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Section 1. The charter for the North Santa Rosa County Utilities Authority is created to read:

Section 1. Authority and service area created.—There is hereby created and established a local governmental body, corporate and politic, to be known as the "North Santa Rosa County Utilities Authority," hereinafter referred to as the "authority." The service area of the North Santa Rosa County Utilities Authority shall be within Santa Rosa County north of the Yellow River, East Bay, and Escambia Bay, and areas adjacent thereto. The authority is hereby declared to be an independent special district.

Section 2. Legislative findings.—The Legislature finds and declares that the health, welfare, and safety of the inhabitants of North Santa Rosa would be enhanced by the creation of an independent authority for the purposes enumerated in this charter; that the creation of an independent authority will serve a public purpose; that the new authority will be able to use economies of scale and thereby achieve cost savings to the public; that the establishment of an independent authority will enhance the likelihood of more favorable financing for the water and wastewater services in the county; that some of the existing sewer systems in certain areas of the county are near maximum capacity, while the sewer system in other areas of the county have excess capacity and are underused; and that the provision

51 of additional water and sewer capacity in the county will serve
52 the public and a public purpose. Additionally, the Legislature
53 finds that the continuing transition from septic to sewer that
54 may be enhanced by the establishment and operation of the
55 authority will benefit environmental quality of the county
56 overall and help ensure the continuing pristine water quality of
57 the Blackwater River.

58 Section 3. Purposes.—The authority is created for the
59 purpose of acquiring, constructing, financing, owning, managing,
60 providing, promoting, improving, expanding, maintaining,
61 operating, regulating, franchising, and otherwise having
62 authority to provide water, sewer, and such other additional
63 utilities as provided in this act within Santa Rosa County north
64 of the Yellow River, Escambia Bay, and East Bay, and areas
65 adjacent thereto.

66 Section 4. Initial governing body.—Effective upon this act
67 becoming a law:

68 (a) The initial governing body of the authority shall
69 consist of:

70 (1) The chair of the Board of County Commissioners of
71 Santa Rosa County or his or her designee.

72 (2) The mayor of the City of Milton or his or her
73 designee.

74 (3) The mayor of the City of Jay or his or her designee.

75 (4) The director of the Northwest Florida Water Management

76 District or his or her designee.

77 (5) The general manager of the Pace Water System, Inc., or
 78 his or her designee.

79 (6) A faculty member of the University of Florida
 80 Watershed Management Lab at the University of Florida Institute
 81 of Food and Agricultural Sciences' West Florida Research and
 82 Education Center or a faculty's designee.

83 (7) A resident of Santa Rosa County who is engaged in the
 84 building trade, in property development, or in real estate and
 85 who will serve ex officio. Such person shall be selected by the
 86 other members of the initial governing body of the authority.

87
 88 The members of the initial governing body of the authority shall
 89 serve until the members of the governing body of the authority,
 90 as provided under section 5, takes office.

91 (b) The initial governing body shall have the power to
 92 appoint an interim executive director who shall have the same
 93 qualifications as provided in section 12 and shall serve until
 94 the governing body of the authority, as provided under section
 95 5, takes office. The interim executive director may be
 96 reappointed by the governing body of the authority after the
 97 governing body takes office.

98 (c) The interim executive director may employ up to three
 99 full-time equivalents in performance of his or her duties, may
 100 lease office space, contract and pay for the costs and fees of

101 consultants, advisors, and others to conduct a report under
 102 subsection (d), and perform all other duties for the effective
 103 and efficient operation of the initial authority.

104 (d) Upon departing office pursuant to subsection (a), the
 105 initial governing body shall submit to the incoming governing
 106 body of the authority, as well as the Governor, the President of
 107 the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, a
 108 report containing, at minimum:

109 (1) An assessment of current water and wastewater needs of
 110 the authority's service area. This assessment must include, but
 111 need not be limited to, a discussion of the environmental, water
 112 quality, and water availability impacts from the wells, septic
 113 systems, and water and wastewater infrastructure currently being
 114 used in the authority's service area.

115 (2) An assessment of the anticipated growth in water and
 116 wastewater needs in the authority's service area.

117 (3) A 20-year plan recommendation to address the current
 118 and anticipated water and wastewater needs for the authority's
 119 service area.

120 (4) Identification of any current water or wastewater
 121 system in, or adjacent to, the authority's service area that
 122 would mutually benefit from consolidation with the authority
 123 through improved economies of scale, better access to lower
 124 material and supply costs, better access to capital, improvement
 125 in utility infrastructure, or improvement in the quality of

126 service overall.

127 (5) A financial assessment and recommendations to fund the
 128 recommended plan developed pursuant to paragraph (3) and any
 129 acquisition or consolidation identified in paragraph (4).

130 Section 5. Governing body.—

131 (a) The governing body of the authority shall consist of
 132 five members. Members shall be elected by a majority of their
 133 electors in partisan elections using the primary and general
 134 election system provided for in chapter 100, Florida Statutes.
 135 Candidates must qualify for nomination to such offices in the
 136 manner provided in chapter 99, Florida Statutes, for the
 137 qualification of candidates for the office of county
 138 commissioner and must qualify with the Supervisor of Elections
 139 of Santa Rosa County.

140 (b) Members shall be elected, in the primary and general
 141 elections held in 2028, by districts under the district plan of
 142 the Board of County Commissioners of Santa Rosa County,
 143 hereinafter referred to as the "board," as modified by this
 144 subsection. Each member from Districts 1 and 3 must be an
 145 elector of the district from which he or she is elected and
 146 shall be elected by the qualified electors of that respective
 147 district. The member from District 2 must be an elector of that
 148 district north of the Yellow River, East Bay, and Escambia Bay
 149 and shall be elected by the qualified electors of that district
 150 north of the Yellow River, East Bay, and Escambia Bay. Each of

151 the two remaining members must be an elector of the service area
152 of the North Santa Rosa County Utilities Authority and shall be
153 elected in an At-Large District by the qualified electors of the
154 service area of the of the authority in Santa Rosa County north
155 of the Yellow River, East Bay, and Escambia Bay. Members elected
156 for Districts 2 and 3 at the general election held in 2028 shall
157 be elected to a 2-year term. Members elected for District 1 and
158 the At-Large Districts at the general election held in 2028
159 shall serve for a 4-year term. Thereafter each member shall be
160 elected for a 4-year term. The term of office of each member
161 shall commence on the second Tuesday following the general
162 election in which such member is elected. Upon the expiration of
163 a term of office, a successor to the office shall be elected as
164 provided in this subsection; however, upon the occasion of a
165 vacancy for any elected office which occurs before the
166 expiration of the present term of that office, a successor, who
167 must be a resident of the district in which the vacancy
168 occurred, shall be appointed by the Governor. Any person
169 appointed to fill a vacancy shall be appointed to serve for only
170 the remainder unexpired term, until a successor is duly elected
171 pursuant to this subsection. If the Governor fails to make an
172 appointment with 90 days after the date of the vacancy, the
173 chair of the board shall nominate two persons from the district
174 in which the vacancy occurred as potential candidates to fill
175 the vacancy. The remaining members, excluding the chair, shall

176 select, by majority vote, one of the two nominees to fill the
177 vacancy.

178 (c) Members are eligible for reelection.

179 (d) Before entering upon his or her duties, each member
180 shall take an oath to administer the duties of office faithfully
181 and impartially, and a record of such oath shall be filed in the
182 office of the Secretary of State.

183 (e) As compensation for performance of duties and
184 responsibilities set forth herein, members of the authority and
185 their successors shall receive monthly from the authority an
186 amount to be determined by majority vote of the members of the
187 authority, not to exceed the amount of compensation received
188 monthly by members of the Santa Rosa County School Board, and
189 shall also be reimbursed by the authority for per diem and
190 travel expenses as provided in section 112.061, Florida
191 Statutes, for attending meetings of the authority or performing
192 official duties pertaining to the authority. Members may receive
193 reimbursement from the authority for additional, unusual, or
194 extraordinary expenses upon approval by the authority.

195 (f) The authority shall elect a chair and a vice chair
196 from the members of the authority, each of whom shall serve for
197 1 year or until his or her successor is chosen. The chair, or
198 the vice chair in the chair's absence, shall preside at all
199 meetings of the authority and shall perform such additional
200 duties prescribed by the members or in the bylaws of the

201 authority. The authority shall hold regular meetings at least
202 monthly at such times and places as it may designate and may
203 hold more frequent special meetings. A majority of the
204 membership shall constitute a quorum for the purpose of meeting
205 and transacting business. Each member of the authority shall
206 have one vote. The authority may adopt bylaws and may make all
207 policies, procedures, rules, and regulations not inconsistent
208 with this act which it may deem necessary respecting the conduct
209 of its affairs, including, but not limited to, the operation of
210 its utility systems. Such policies, procedures, rules, and
211 regulations must provide for notice of all public meetings and
212 must provide that an agenda shall be prepared by the authority
213 in time to ensure that a copy of the agenda will be available at
214 least 3 days before any regular meeting of the authority. After
215 the agenda has been made available, a change may be made only
216 for good cause, as determined by the person designated to
217 preside at the meeting, and stated in the record. Special or
218 emergency meetings may be called by the chair upon no less than
219 24 hours' notice. The authority shall publish and thereafter
220 codify and index all rules, regulations, and resolutions
221 formulated, adopted, or used by the authority in the discharge
222 of its functions. Such rules, regulations, and resolutions must
223 be made available for public inspection and copying, at no more
224 than cost. The authority is not an agency within the meaning of
225 chapter 120, Florida Statutes. The authority is an agency within

226 the meaning of chapter 119, Florida Statutes, and all records of
227 the authority must be open to the public. The authority is an
228 agency or authority of the county for purposes of section
229 286.011, Florida Statutes, the Government in the Sunshine Law.
230 In addition to the provisions of the Code of Ethics for Public
231 Officers and Employees, part III of chapter 112, Florida
232 Statutes, a consultant to the authority may not have or hold any
233 employment or contractual relationship with a business entity,
234 other than the authority, in connection with any contract in
235 which the consultant personally participated through decision,
236 approval, disapproval, recommendation, rendering of advice, or
237 investigation while serving as the consultant to the authority.
238 However, this provision does not preclude the award of a
239 contract to a consultant if such contract is awarded after open
240 competitive bidding, and if the consultant submits the low bid.

241 Section 6. Powers.—

242 (a) The authority has all powers and authorities
243 necessary, convenient, or desirable to accomplish the purposes
244 of this act. The authority has:

245 (1) The power to borrow and expend money to pay for any of
246 the purposes of the authority; to issue its bonds, notes in
247 anticipation of the issuance of bonds, revenue certificates, or
248 other evidences of indebtedness, including obligations issued to
249 refund or refinance bonds, notes, certificates, or other
250 evidences of indebtedness; and to pledge any revenues of the

251 authority for the repayment of bonds, notes, certificates, or
252 other evidences of indebtedness, including any revenues provided
253 to the authority by governmental entities or other entities for
254 pledge by the authority as security for payment of such
255 obligations, all in the manner and subject to such limitations
256 as may be prescribed by resolution of the authority, including,
257 but not limited to, the powers granted under chapter 125, part I
258 of chapter 153, part I of chapter 159, part II of chapter 166,
259 and chapter 170, Florida Statutes, and chapter 57-1313, Laws of
260 Florida. The bonds, notes, certificates, or other evidences of
261 indebtedness authorized to be issued by this act may be
262 validated in the manner prescribed in chapter 75, Florida
263 Statutes. Any complaint for validation permitted by the
264 preceding sentence must be filed in the Circuit Court of Santa
265 Rosa County. The authority may enter into trust agreements with
266 banks or other corporate entities possessing trust powers within
267 or without the State of Florida. The authority may create liens
268 upon or security interests in its assets, properties, funds, or
269 revenues, of whatever kind or nature, and may specify the
270 priority or order of such liens or security interests. Such
271 creation and specification of priority or order may be made by
272 resolution of the authority or in a trust agreement to which the
273 authority is a party. The passage of such resolution or the
274 execution of such trust agreement is sufficient to the creation
275 and specification of priority and order of such liens and

276 security interests, and it is not necessary to comply with the
277 requirements of the Uniform Commercial Code respecting the
278 filing of a financing statement to perfect a security interest
279 granted by the authority. In the exercise of the powers granted
280 by this paragraph, the authority must comply in all respects
281 with the requirements of chapter 218, Florida Statutes.

282 (2) All power and authority granted by law, ordinance,
283 franchise, or otherwise to any county, municipality, special
284 district, or other unit of local government as such powers and
285 authority are related to sewage collection and disposal, and
286 water supply, including, but not limited to, the powers granted
287 under chapter 125, chapter 127, part I of chapter 153, part I of
288 chapter 159, part I of chapter 163, part II of chapter 166,
289 chapter 170, including the issuance of bonds or notes in
290 anticipation thereof payable from special assessments under that
291 chapter and chapter 180, Florida Statutes, and chapter 57-1313,
292 Laws of Florida.

293 (3) The power to establish service districts and
294 reasonable rate classifications for purposes of providing
295 utilities services. The authority shall endeavor to provide that
296 the costs of any improvements to or expansions of the systems
297 are borne by those users of the systems who benefit from such
298 improvements or expansions.

299 (4) The power to set, fix, pledge to establish, or
300 establish, levy, or impose assessments, rates, fees, and other

301 charges for the use of and for the services furnished or to be
302 furnished by the authority's systems, and to alter and amend
303 same from time to time, which assessments, rates, fees, and
304 charges, together with other revenues and receipts, must result
305 in the authority's receiving or possessing an amount not less
306 than is required to operate and maintain a self-liquidating or
307 self-sustaining utility system.

308 (5) The power of eminent domain, as provided by general
309 law, to carry out the purposes described in this act. As a
310 condition precedent to instituting eminent domain proceedings,
311 the authority must first receive the approval of the governing
312 body of the jurisdiction in which the subject property is
313 located.

314 (6) The power to apply for and accept grants, loans, and
315 subsidies from any governmental entity for the construction,
316 operation, and maintenance of the systems, facilities, or
317 functions under jurisdiction of the authority, and to comply
318 with all requirements and conditions imposed in connection
319 therewith.

320 (7) The power and authority to perform any of its
321 functions by lease or contract with any other public or private
322 entity.

323 (8) All other powers, not expressly prohibited by the
324 United States or Florida Constitutions or by general law,
325 necessary to carry out the purposes and intent of this act.

326 (9) All privileges, immunities, and exemptions accorded
327 political subdivisions of this state under the provisions of the
328 constitution and laws of the state. Neither the members of the
329 authority nor any person executing any contract or obligation on
330 its behalf shall be personally liable or accountable thereon or
331 by reason thereof.

332 (10) Only those powers granted by general law to counties
333 or municipalities with respect to mandatory sewer taps or sewer
334 utilization or with respect to the acquisition of privately or
335 customer-owned water systems. The authority shall determine
336 fees, rates, and charges for connection to its system pursuant
337 to section 8.

338 (11) The power to purchase, own, convey, sell, lease,
339 rent, or encumber air space, development rights, tower space, or
340 any other interests in property above the surface of any land
341 pursuant to such terms and conditions as the authority in its
342 discretion may determine.

343 (12) The power to provide any and all utilities services
344 authorized by this act to areas outside the territorial limits
345 of Santa Rosa County, but adjacent thereto, if capacity is
346 available.

347 (13) The power to establish civil penalties, including the
348 imposition of fines, for the violation of rules or regulations
349 of the authority pertaining to the disposal of waste or the use
350 of the authority's systems, facilities, or services. The

351 authority may enforce the rules and regulations adopted pursuant
 352 to this section, by suit for injunction or other appropriate
 353 action in the courts of the state.

354 (14) All powers granted to municipalities and to counties
 355 with respect to membership and participation in and ownership of
 356 any separate legal entity created to the purposes of any
 357 financing program or loan pool as set forth in section
 358 163.01(7) (d), Florida Statutes.

359 (b) Any power granted herein may be exercised by
 360 resolution of the authority duly adopted, and any such
 361 resolution must be recorded in the minutes of the authority.

362 (c)(1) If the authority determines that it is necessary or
 363 appropriate for the authority to provide, operate, or maintain
 364 resource recovery systems or solid waste collection,
 365 distribution, or disposal systems, the authority may specify
 366 such additional utility systems by resolution. Upon approval of
 367 such resolution by the governmental body of the jurisdiction
 368 which such other additional utility system or systems shall
 369 serve, the authority, with respect to these specified utility
 370 systems, shall be vested with all power set forth herein or in
 371 general law that would, but for the provisions of this act,
 372 apply to such specified utility systems. All powers granted to
 373 the authority by this act regarding such specified utilities
 374 systems apply only to the designated areas in the county by
 375 section 3.

376 (2) In providing, operating, or maintaining resource
377 recovery systems or solid waste collection, distribution, or
378 disposal systems, the authority shall use the most cost-
379 effective means of providing such systems and is encouraged to
380 contract with private persons on a competitive basis for any and
381 all such systems in order to ensure that such services are
382 provided on the most cost-effective basis. In accordance with
383 section 403.7063, Florida Statutes, the authority may not
384 discriminate against private persons who provide resource
385 recovery systems or solid waste collection, distribution, or
386 disposal systems.

387 (3) The authority shall seek competitive bids for all
388 construction-related activities pertaining to resource recovery
389 systems or solid waste collection, distribution, or disposal
390 systems when the estimated total cost of construction will
391 exceed \$5,000.

392 (d) The powers provided in this act are not intended to be
393 exclusive or restrictive. It is the intent of the Legislature
394 that the authority has all implied powers necessary or
395 incidental to carrying out the expressed powers and the
396 expressed purposes for which the authority is created. These
397 implied powers include, but are not limited to, the authority to
398 employ personnel, to borrow and expend money, to enter into
399 contractual obligations, to employ legal counsel, and to
400 purchase, lease, sell, or exchange real or personal property.

401 That this act specifically provides that the authority possesses
 402 a certain power does not mean that the authority must exercise
 403 such power, unless so specifically required in this act. The
 404 authority's power to levy special assessments does not grant the
 405 authority the power to levy taxes.

406 Section 7. Public purpose.—The Legislature finds and
 407 declares that the creation of the authority and the carrying out
 408 of its purposes are in all respects for the benefit of the
 409 people of this state and Santa Rosa County; that the authority
 410 is performing an essential governmental function; that all
 411 property of such authority is and shall in all respects be
 412 considered to be public property, and title to such property
 413 shall be held by the authority for the benefit of the public;
 414 that the use of such property, until disposed of upon such terms
 415 as the authority may find just, shall be for essential public
 416 and governmental purposes; and that all bonds, notes, revenue
 417 certificates, or other evidences of indebtedness and interest or
 418 income thereon and all of the property, facilities, services,
 419 and activities of the authority are declared to be nontaxable
 420 for any and all purposes by the state or any unit of government
 421 herein to the same extent as if owned or issued by or on behalf
 422 of a county or municipality of the state.

423 Section 8. Rate setting procedure.—

424 (a) Subject to the provisions of this act, the authority
 425 shall fix the initial schedule of assessments, rates, fees, and

426 other charges for the use of and for the services furnished or
427 to be furnished by the authority's facilities, to be paid by the
428 owner, tenant, or occupant of each lot or parcel of property who
429 may be connected with and use any such facility by or through
430 any part of the water, or other additional utility systems of
431 the authority.

432 (b) After the system or systems has been in operation, the
433 authority may revise the schedule of assessments, rates, fees,
434 and charges from time to time upon its own motion, pursuant to
435 the provisions of this act. Such assessments, rates, fees, and
436 charges shall be so fixed and revised as to provide funds, with
437 other funds available for such purposes, sufficient at all times
438 to pay the cost of maintaining, repairing, and operating the
439 system or systems, including the reserves for such purposes and
440 for replacements and depreciation and necessary extensions, to
441 pay the principal of and the interest on any bonds as the same
442 shall become due and the reserves therefor, and to provide a
443 margin of safety for making such payments. The authority shall
444 charge and collect the assessments, rates, fees, and charges so
445 fixed or revised.

446 (c) Assessments, rates, fees, and charges established,
447 charged, and collected by the authority must be just,
448 reasonable, compensatory, and not unfairly discriminatory, and
449 may be based or computed upon the quantity of water consumed,
450 upon the number and size of sewer connections, upon the number

451 and kind of plumbing fixtures in use in the premises connected
452 with the sewer system, upon the number or average number of
453 persons residing or working in or otherwise connected with such
454 premises, upon any other factor affecting the use of the
455 facilities furnished, or upon any combination of the foregoing
456 factors. Before fixing or revising the schedule of rates, fees,
457 and charges, the authority shall cause to be prepared a
458 statement of financial impact. The statement shall be made
459 available to the public during the ratemaking procedure.

460 (d) In cases in which the amount of water furnished to any
461 building or premises is such that it imposes an unreasonable
462 burden upon the water system, an additional reasonable charge
463 may be made therefor, or the authority may, if it reasonably
464 finds it advisable for the operational health of the overall
465 system, require the owners or occupants of such building or
466 premises to reduce the amount of water consumed thereon in a
467 manner to be specified by the authority, or the authority may
468 refuse to furnish water to such building or premises.

469 (e) In cases in which the character of the sewage from any
470 manufacturing or industrial plant or any building or premises is
471 such that it imposes an unreasonable burden upon any sewage
472 disposal system, an additional charge may be made therefor, or
473 the authority may, if it reasonably finds it advisable, require
474 the manufacturing or industrial plant or the building or
475 premises to treat the sewage in such manner as shall be

476 specified by the authority before discharging the sewage into
477 any sewer lines owned or maintained by the authority.

478 (f) The authority may charge any owner or occupant of any
479 building or premises receiving the services of the facilities
480 herein provided that the initial installation or connection
481 charge or fee is just and reasonable.

482 (g)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), assessments,
483 rates, fees, or charges may not be fixed under the foregoing
484 provisions of this section until after a public hearing at which
485 all of the users of the authority's facilities and owners,
486 tenants, and occupants of property served or to be served
487 thereby and all others interested shall have an opportunity to
488 be heard concerning the proposed assessments, rates, fees, and
489 charges. After the adoption by the authority of a resolution
490 setting forth the preliminary schedule or schedules fixing such
491 assessments, rates, fees, and charges, notice of such public
492 hearing setting forth the schedule or schedules of assessments,
493 rates, fees, and charges shall be given:

494 a. By publication in a newspaper of general circulation in
495 the affected area;

496 b. By mail or electronic communication to all persons and
497 organizations that have made requests for advance notice of the
498 authority's proceedings; and

499 c. By posting in appropriate places so that affected
500 persons may be duly notified.

501
502 Such publication, mailing, and posting of notice must occur at
503 least 14 days before the public hearing. The hearing may be
504 adjourned from time to time. After the hearing, the preliminary
505 schedule, or schedules, either as originally adopted or as
506 modified or amended, shall be adopted and put into effect. The
507 assessments, rates, fees, or charges so fixed for any users or
508 property served shall be extended to cover any additional users
509 or property thereafter served that fall within the same class or
510 classes without the necessity of any hearing or notice.

511 (2) The authority may fix the assessments, rates, fees,
512 and charges to be paid by any user, owner, tenant, or occupant
513 as the authority reasonably finds to be unique with respect to
514 its use of the authority's systems or facilities. The
515 assessments, rates, fees, and charges may be fixed by resolution
516 adopted at any regular meeting, or any special meeting of the
517 authority called for that purpose, and the resolution shall
518 state the basis for such finding.

519 (3) A copy of the schedule or schedules of the
520 assessments, rates, fees, and charges as finally fixed in the
521 resolution shall be kept on file in the headquarters of the
522 authority and must be open to inspection by all parties
523 interested.

524 (4) Any change or revision of any assessments, rates,
525 fees, or charges may be made in the same manner as such

526 assessments, rates, fees, or charges were originally established
 527 as hereinabove provided.

528 Section 9. Personnel.—

529 (a) The authority may adopt policies for the appointment,
 530 removal, or suspension of employees or agents of the authority
 531 and fix their compensation, which policies must be no less
 532 protective than the protections required under part II of
 533 chapter 110, Florida Statutes.

534 (b) The authority may provide social security for its
 535 employees pursuant to chapter 650, Florida Statutes, and may
 536 bring its employees under the Florida Retirement System, the
 537 State and County Officers and Employees Retirement System, or
 538 any other qualified retirement program.

539 Section 10. Personnel disciplinary procedures.—The
 540 authority shall conduct all employee or agent disciplinary
 541 proceedings according to its policies adopted under section 9,
 542 which must be no less protective than the rules of the
 543 Department of Management Services, or its successor, adopted
 544 pursuant to section 110.227, Florida Statutes, including,
 545 without limitation, proceedings for corrective action,
 546 termination of employees or agents, and appeals. This section
 547 does not subject the authority to the jurisdiction of the
 548 Department of Management Services or its successor, include the
 549 authority within the definition of agency for purposes of
 550 chapter 110, Florida Statutes, or require appeals to be handled

551 by the Public Employees Relations Commission. The authority may
552 engage the services of administrative law judges through the
553 Division of Administrative Hearings to render nonbinding
554 recommended orders to the executive director for the appeals.
555 The executive director of the authority shall provide the
556 administrative services required by the board.

557 Section 11. Process and procedure.—

558 (a) Any person wishing to appeal a termination of service
559 or an assessment of fees, charges, or fines; a notice of claim
560 of lien; or an increase in security deposit that directly
561 affects his or her substantial interests may file a petition for
562 review within 10 days after the date the complained action is
563 taken. The authority shall consider such petitions for review
564 and shall take action at a public meeting to grant or deny such
565 petitions within 40 days after receipt.

566 (b) If the petition is granted, the petitioner, or his or
567 her counsel, shall be afforded an opportunity, at a mutually
568 convenient time and place and after reasonable written notice,
569 to present to the authority or its designee written or oral
570 evidence in opposition to the authority's action. If a material
571 issue of disputed fact is involved, the authority shall appoint
572 a hearing officer to preside. The hearing officer shall hear the
573 evidence and shall prepare recommended findings of fact and
574 conclusions of law for approval of the authority.

575 (c) Decisions of the authority must be in writing and must

576 contain findings of fact and conclusions of law. A person
577 aggrieved by a decision of the authority shall have the same
578 rights and remedies that would have been available to him or her
579 under general law if the action complained of had been taken by
580 Santa Rosa County.

581 Section 12. Executive director.—The authority shall employ
582 and fix the compensation of an executive director, who shall
583 manage the affairs of the utilities systems under the
584 supervision of the authority and direct the activities of the
585 employees of the authority. The executive director shall devote
586 his or her entire working time to the performance of his or her
587 duties. The executive director must be a college graduate. The
588 executive director must either possess a degree in science,
589 engineering, business management, or public administration or,
590 alternatively, be a licensed and registered engineer. The
591 executive director must have at least 6 years of experience in
592 the field of engineering, operations, or management of a water
593 and sewer utility system. The authority may allow the
594 substitution of additional years of administrative or management
595 experience in lieu of the specific educational or professional
596 requirements set forth above.

597 Section 13. Fiscal year and budget.—The fiscal year of the
598 authority shall begin on the first day of October and end on the
599 last day of September of the following year. Before the
600 beginning of each fiscal year, the authority shall adopt an

601 annual budget that shall be balanced and that shall detail the
602 anticipated expenses and revenues of the authority for the
603 forthcoming fiscal year.

604 Section 14. Execution of documents; payment of bills.—All
605 instruments in writing necessary to be executed by the authority
606 shall be executed by the executive director upon authorization
607 by the authority or by such other officer, agent, or employee of
608 the authority as it may by resolution designate. The authority
609 shall provide for the examination of all payrolls, bills, and
610 other claims and demands against the authority to determine,
611 before the same are paid, that they are duly authorized, in
612 proper form, correctly computed, and legally due and payable and
613 that the authority has funds on hand to make payment.

614 Section 15. Management efficiency audit.—The authority
615 shall contract for a management efficiency audit by a private
616 firm beginning in 2030, and at intervals of at least 3 years
617 thereafter, to review program results and make recommendations
618 for the proper, efficient, and economical operation and
619 maintenance of the utilities systems, facilities, and functions
620 under supervision of the authority.

621 Section 16. Citizens' advisory committee.—The authority
622 shall make provision for and appoint a citizens' advisory
623 committee or committees. The appointees to such committees may
624 not have personal or business ties with the authority which
625 could be construed as a conflict of interest.

626 Section 17. Enforcement and penalties.—Any violation of
627 rules or regulations of the authority pertaining to the disposal
628 of waste or the use of the authority's systems, facilities, or
629 services is declared to be a noncriminal violation and are
630 punishable by fine, forfeiture, or penalty. Such fine,
631 forfeiture, or penalty shall be established by resolution of the
632 authority and may not exceed \$500 for each violation. However,
633 the authority may specify, by resolution, that violation of a
634 rule or regulation of the authority is punishable by fine,
635 forfeiture, or penalty in an amount exceeding \$500 but not
636 exceeding \$2,000 per day, if the authority must have authority
637 to punish a violation of such rule or regulation by a fine,
638 forfeiture, or penalty in an amount greater than \$500 in order
639 for the authority to carry out a federally mandated program. Any
640 resolution of the authority establishing such fine, forfeiture,
641 or penalty may provide that each day of a continuing violation
642 shall constitute a separate violation. Violations of such
643 authority rules and regulations may be prosecuted in the same
644 manner as misdemeanors, or pursuant to section 6(a) (13). If such
645 violations are prosecuted in the same manner as misdemeanors,
646 they may be enforced by local law enforcement agencies and
647 prosecuted in the name of the state in a court having
648 jurisdiction of misdemeanors by the prosecuting attorney
649 thereof. All fines, forfeitures, and penalties imposed for
650 violations of authority rules and regulations shall be paid to

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651 the authority, provided that the local law enforcement agency is
652 reimbursed from such fines, forfeitures, and penalties for its
653 cost of enforcement.

654 Section 18. The provisions of this act shall be liberally
655 construed to carry out the purposes set forth in this act.

656 Section 19. If any provision of this act or the
657 application thereof to any person or circumstance is held
658 invalid, the invalidity may not affect other provisions or
659 applications of the act which can be given effect without the
660 invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions
661 of this act are severable.

662 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2024.