

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Governmental Oversight and Accountability

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BILL: SB 7000

INTRODUCER: Criminal Justice Committee

SUBJECT: OGSR/Criminal History Records/Department of Law Enforcement

DATE: January 9, 2018      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	Jones	Jones		<b>CJ Submitted as Committee Bill</b>
1.	Brown	Caldwell	GO	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			RC	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 7000 provides an Open Government Sunset Review of a public records exemption that protects from disclosure certain criminal history records of victims of human trafficking.

The original public necessity statement for the bill provides that victims of human trafficking who have been convicted of crimes committed at the direction of their traffickers are themselves victims of crimes. Moreover, without the public records exemption, these victims face barriers to employment and other life opportunities. The justification upon which the public records exemption is based remains valid. Additionally, since the time that the law passed enabling victims of human trafficking to seek an expunction of a criminal record, FDLE has processed 33 orders of expunction. Therefore, for these reasons, the bill reenacts the public records exemption.

This bill deletes the scheduled repeal of the current public records exemption for court-ordered expunged criminal history records of human trafficking victims. If the bill passes, these records will continue to be confidential and exempt from public disclosure.

The bill requires a majority vote for passage.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Public Records Law**

The Florida Constitution provides that the public has the right to inspect or copy records made or received in connection with official governmental business.<sup>1</sup> This applies to the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, including all three branches of state government, local governmental entities, and any person acting on behalf of the government.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

<sup>2</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

In addition to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes provide that the public may access legislative and executive branch records.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 119, F.S., constitutes the main body of public records laws, and is known as the Public Records Act.<sup>4</sup> The Public Records Act states that

it is the policy of this state that all state, county, and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person. Providing access to public records is a duty of each agency.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Public Records Act, a public record includes virtually any document or recording, regardless of its physical form or how it may be transmitted.<sup>6</sup> The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted public records as being “any material prepared in connection with official agency business which is intended to perpetuate, communicate or formalize knowledge of some type.”<sup>7</sup> A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.<sup>8</sup>

The Legislature may create an exemption to open meetings requirements by passing a general law by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate.<sup>9</sup> The exemption must explicitly lay out the public necessity justifying the exemption, and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.<sup>10</sup> A statutory exemption which does not meet these two criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.<sup>11</sup>

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is ‘confidential and exempt’ or ‘exempt.’<sup>12</sup> Records designated as ‘confidential and exempt’ may

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<sup>3</sup> The Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records. *Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So. 2d 32 (Fla. 1992). Also see *Times Pub. Co. v. Ake*, 660 So. 2d 255 (Fla. 1995). The Legislature’s records are public pursuant to s. 11.0431, F.S. Public records exemptions for the Legislature are primarily located in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.01(1), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines “public record” to mean “all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of the physical form, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.” Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines “agency” as “any state, county, district, authority, or municipal officer, department, division, board, bureau, commission, or other separate unit of government created or established by law including, for the purposes of this chapter, the Commission on Ethics, the Public Service Commission, and the Office of Public Counsel, and any other public or private agency, person, partnership, corporation, or business entity acting on behalf of any public agency.”

<sup>7</sup> *Shevin v. Byron, Harless, Schaffer, Reid and Assoc. Inc.*, 379 So. 2d 633, 640 (Fla. 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Section 119.10, F.S. Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes, as are the penalties for violating those laws.

<sup>9</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>10</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>11</sup> *Halifax Hosp. Medical Center v. New-Journal Corp.*, 724 So. 2d 567 (Fla. 1999). In *Halifax Hospital*, the Florida Supreme Court found that a public meetings exemption was unconstitutional because the statement of public necessity did not define important terms and did not justify the breadth of the exemption. *Id.* at 570. The Florida Supreme Court also declined to narrow the exemption in order to save it. *Id.* In *Baker County Press, Inc. v. Baker County Medical Services, Inc.*, 870 So. 2d 189 (Fla. 1st DCA 2004), the court found that the intent of a statute was to create a public records exemption. The *Baker County Press* court found that since the law did not contain a public necessity statement, it was unconstitutional. *Id.* at 196.

<sup>12</sup> If the Legislature designates a record as confidential, such record may not be released to anyone other than the persons or entities specifically designated in the statutory exemption. *WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So. 2d 48 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

be released by the records custodian only under the circumstances defined by the Legislature. Records designated as ‘exempt’ may be released at the discretion of the records custodian under certain circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

### **Open Government Sunset Review Act**

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (referred to hereafter as the “OGSR”) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings exemptions.<sup>14</sup> The OGSR provides that an exemption automatically repeals on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment; in order to save an exemption from repeal, the Legislature must reenact the exemption.<sup>15</sup> In practice, many exemptions are continued by repealing the sunset date rather than reenacting the exemption.

The OGSR provides that a public records or open meetings exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and is no broader than is necessary.<sup>16</sup> An exemption serves an identifiable purpose if it meets one of the following purposes *and* the Legislature finds that the purpose of the exemption outweighs open government policy and cannot be accomplished without the exemption:

- It allows the state or its political subdivision to effectively and efficiently administer a program, and administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;<sup>17</sup>
- Releasing sensitive personal information would be defamatory or would jeopardize an individual’s safety. If this public purpose is cited as the basis of an exemption, however, only personal identifying information is exempt;<sup>18</sup> or
- It protects trade or business secrets.<sup>19</sup>

The OGSR also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.<sup>20</sup> In examining an exemption, the OGSR asks the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption.

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<sup>13</sup> A record classified as exempt from public disclosure may be disclosed under certain circumstances. *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So. 2d 683 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Section 119.15, F.S. Section 119.15(4)(b), F.S., provides that an exemption is considered to be substantially amended if it is expanded to include more information or to include meetings. The OGSR does not apply to an exemption that is required by federal law or that applies solely to the Legislature or the State Court System pursuant to section 119.15(2), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S. The specified questions are:

- What specific records or meetings are affected by the exemption?
- Whom does the exemption uniquely affect, as opposed to the general public?
- What is the identifiable public purpose or goal of the exemption?
- Can the information contained in the records or discussed in the meeting be readily obtained by alternative means? If so, how?
- Is the record or meeting protected by another exemption?
- Are there multiple exemptions for the same type of record or meeting that it would be appropriate to merge?

If, in reenacting an exemption, the exemption is expanded, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.<sup>21</sup> If the exemption is reenacted without substantive changes or if the exemption is narrowed, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are *not* required. If the Legislature allows an exemption to sunset, the previously exempt records will remain exempt unless provided for by law.<sup>22</sup>

## **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims of human trafficking, ranging from young children to adults, are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. An estimated 20.9 million adults and children in the world are in some sort of forced labor or sexual exploitation. Of that number, an estimated 26 percent are children. Based on 2010 data, researchers estimate that as many as 300,000 children in the United States are at risk for exploitation each year.<sup>23</sup>

Section 787.06, F.S., Florida's human trafficking statute, defines "human trafficking" as the transporting, soliciting, recruiting, harboring, providing, enticing, maintaining, or obtaining of another person for the purpose of exploiting that person. A victim of human trafficking is a person subjected to coercion,<sup>24</sup> for the purpose of being used in human trafficking, a child under 18 years of age subjected to human trafficking, or an individual subjected to human trafficking as defined by federal law.<sup>25</sup>

## **Open Government Sunset Review of the Public Records Exemption for Expunged Criminal History Record of a Victim of Human Trafficking**

In 2013, the Legislature created s. 943.0583, F.S.<sup>26</sup> Section 943.0583, F.S., allows a victim of human trafficking to petition the court for the expunction of a criminal history record resulting from the arrest or filing of charges for an offense committed or reported to have been committed while the person was a victim of human trafficking, which offense was committed or reported to have been committed as a part of the human trafficking scheme of which the person was a victim

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<sup>21</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>22</sup> Section 119.15(7), F.S.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *OJP Fact Sheet, Fast Facts*, (Dec. 2011), available at [http://ojp.gov/newsroom/factsheets/ojpfs\\_humantrafficking.html](http://ojp.gov/newsroom/factsheets/ojpfs_humantrafficking.html) (last visited Dec. 14, 2017). Polaris, *Human Trafficking: The Facts*, 2016, available at <https://polarisproject.org/facts> (last visited Dec. 14, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> "Coercion" means using or threatening to use physical force against any person; restraining, isolating, or confining or threatening to restrain, isolate, or confine any person without lawful authority and against her or his will; using lending or other credit methods to establish a debt by any person when labor or services are pledged as a security for the debt, if the value of the labor or services as reasonably assessed is not applied toward the liquidation of the debt, the length and nature of the labor or services are not respectively limited and defined; destroying, concealing, removing, confiscating, withholding, or possessing any actual or purported passport, visa, or other immigration document, or any other actual or purported government identification document, of any person; causing or threatening to cause financial harm to any person; enticing or luring any person by fraud or deceit; or providing a controlled substance as outlined in Schedule I or Schedule II of s. 893.03, F.S., to any person for the purpose of exploitation of that person.

<sup>25</sup> Section 943.0583(1)(c), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 943.0583(3), F.S.; Chapter 2013-99, L.O.F.

or at the direction of an operator of the scheme.<sup>27</sup> The standard of proof in a petition for expungement is a preponderance of the evidence.

The expunction of a criminal history record is the court-ordered physical destruction or obliteration of a record or portion of a record by any criminal justice agency having custody thereof, or as prescribed by the court issuing the order.<sup>28</sup> A criminal history record ordered expunged under s. 943.0583, F.S., is confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution.<sup>29</sup>

Section 943.0583(10), F.S., is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and stands repealed on October 2, 2018, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

In creating the exemption, the Legislature articulated the following reasons for the exemption:

The Legislature finds that it is a public necessity that a criminal history record ordered expunged under s. 943.0583, Florida Statutes, that is retained by the Department of Law Enforcement be made confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), Florida Statutes, and s. 24(a), Article I of the State Constitution. Persons who are victims of human trafficking and who have been convicted of crimes committed at the behest of their traffickers are themselves victims of crimes. Such victims face barriers to employment and other life opportunities as long as these criminal convictions remain on record and accessible to potential employers and others. It is necessary that these records be made confidential in order for human trafficking victims to have the chance to rebuild their lives and reenter society.<sup>30</sup>

During the 2017 interim, Senate and House professional staff contacted the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers, and the Florida Prosecuting Attorney's Association as part of its review of s. 943.0583, F.S.

A total of 33 orders for expunction have been processed by the FDLE since 2014.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the orders, by year, processed by the FDLE were:

- 1 in 2014;
- 12 in 2015;
- 6 in 2016; and
- 14 to date in 2017.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Section 943.0583(3), F.S., does not allow the following offenses to be expunged: arson, sexual battery, robbery, kidnapping, aggravated child abuse, aggravated abuse of an elderly person or disabled adult, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, murder, manslaughter, aggravated manslaughter of an elderly person or disabled adult, aggravated manslaughter of a child, unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device or bomb, armed burglary, aggravated battery, and aggravated stalking.

<sup>28</sup> Section 943.045(16), F.S.

<sup>29</sup> Section 943.0583(10), F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Chapter 2013-99, L.O.F.

<sup>31</sup> Email from Ronald E. Draa, Director of External Affairs, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, to Senate Criminal Justice Staff (Oct. 19, 2017) (on file with the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

Professional staff from the Senate and the House attempted to ascertain if any victims of human trafficking were experiencing hurdles in the petition process. The Florida Court Clerks and Comptrollers and the Florida Prosecuting Attorney's Association were unaware of any issues.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

SB 7000 provides an Open Government Sunset Review of a public records exemption that protects from disclosure certain criminal history records of victims of human trafficking.

The original public necessity statement for the bill provides that victims of human trafficking who have been convicted of crimes committed at the direction of their traffickers are themselves victims of crimes. Moreover, without the public records exemption, these victims face barriers to employment and other life opportunities. The justification upon which the public records exemption is based remains valid. Additionally, since the time that the law passed enabling victims of human trafficking to seek an expunction of a criminal record, FDLE has processed 33 orders of expunction. Therefore, for these reasons the bill reenacts the public records exemption.

This bill deletes the scheduled repeal of the current public records exemption for court-ordered expunged criminal history records of human trafficking victims. If the bill passes, these records will continue to be confidential and exempt from public disclosure.

The bill requires a majority vote for passage.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2018.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for final passage of a newly created or expanded public records exemption. If an exemption is reenacted without substantive changes or if the exemption is narrowed, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are not required. The bill does not create or expand a public records exemption, therefore it does not require a two-thirds vote for final passage.

#### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

## A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 943.0583 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

## A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

## B. Amendments:

None.