

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.)

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

BILL: CS/SB 1704

INTRODUCER: Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee and Senator Broxson

SUBJECT: Public Records/County Supervisor of Elections

DATE: March 31, 2021

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Rey	Roberts	EE	Favorable
2.	Candelaria	McVane	GO	Fav/CS
3.			RC	

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 1704 makes confidential and exempt from public copying and inspection portions of records held by a supervisor of elections which contain network schematics, hardware and software configurations, or encryption, or which identify detection, investigation, or response practices for suspected or confirmed information technology security incidents, if the disclosure of such records would facilitate unauthorized access, modification, disclosure, or destruction of data, information, or IT resources.

The bill requires that portions of records made exempt must be available to the Auditor General and may be made available to another governmental entity for IT security purposes or in the furtherance of official duties.

The public records exemption shall stand repealed on October 2, 2026, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature, and applies to records held by a supervisor before, on, or after the effective date of the exemption.

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the Florida Constitution.

Because the bill creates a public records exemption, it requires a two-thirds vote of members present and voting in each house of the legislature for final passage.

The bill is not expected to impact state and local revenues and expenditures.

The bill takes effect upon becoming law.

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.¹ This applies to the official business of any public body, officer or employees of the state, including all three branches of state government, local governmental entities and any person acting on behalf of the government.²

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

[i]t 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.⁵

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.⁶ 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.”⁷ A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.⁸

The Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.⁹ An exemption must pass a two-thirds vote of the House and Senate.¹⁰ In addition, an exemption must explicitly lay out the public necessity justifying the exemption, and the exemption must be no broader than

¹ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a)

² *Id.*

³ 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.

⁴ Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

⁵ Section 119.01(1), F.S.

⁶ Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines “public records” 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.”

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

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

⁹ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

¹⁰ *Id.*

necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.¹¹ A statutory exemption which does not meet these criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.¹²

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is ‘confidential and exempt’ or ‘exempt.’¹³ Records designated as ‘confidential and exempt’ may 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.¹⁴

Open Government Sunset Review Act

In addition to the constitutional requirements relating to the enactment of a public records exemption, the Legislature may subject the new or broadened exemption to the Open Government Sunset Review Act (Act).

The Act prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records.¹⁵ The Act 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.¹⁶ In practice, many exemptions are continued by repealing the sunset date rather than reenacting the exemption.

If the Legislature expands an exemption, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.¹⁷ 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 otherwise provided by law.¹⁸

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *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.* 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.

¹³ If the Legislature designates a record as confidential, such record may not be released to anyone other than the person or entities specifically designated in the statutory exemption. *WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

¹⁴ A record classified as exempt from public disclosure may be disclosed under certain circumstances. *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

¹⁵ Section 119.15, F.S. According to s. 119.15(4)(b), F.S., a substantially amended exemption is one that 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 s. 119.15(2), F.S. The OGSR process is currently being followed, however, the Legislature is not required to continue to do so. The Florida Supreme Court has found that one legislature cannot bind a future legislature. *Scott v. Williams*, 107 So.3d 379 (Fla. 2013).

¹⁶ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

¹⁷ FLA CONST., art I, s. 24(c).

¹⁸ Section 119.15(7), F.S.

Supervisor of Elections

A supervisor of elections (supervisor) shall be elected in each county at the general election in each year the number of which is a multiple of four for a four-year term commencing on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January succeeding his or her election.¹⁹ The duties of the supervisor include updating voter registration information, entering new voter registrations into the statewide system, and acting as the official custodian of documents received in relation to elections. The supervisor must preserve statements and other information required to be filed with the supervisor's office for a period of 10 years from date of receipt.

Each supervisor may select and appoint as many deputy supervisors as are necessary, whose compensation must be paid by the supervisor and who has the same powers and whose acts must have the same effect as the acts of a supervisor. Each supervisor must make training in the proper implementation of voter registration procedures available to any individual, group, center for independent living, or public library in the supervisor's county. Each supervisor must ensure that all voter registration and list maintenance procedures conducted by such supervisor are in compliance with any applicable requirements prescribed by rule through the statewide voter registration system.²⁰

When ballots are produced for inspection or examination, no persons other than the supervisor of elections or the supervisor's employees shall touch the ballots. If the ballots are being examined before the of an electoral contest period, the supervisor must make a reasonable effort to notify all candidates by telephone or otherwise of the time and place of the examination. All such candidates, or their representatives, shall be allowed to be present during the inspection or examination.²¹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill makes confidential and exempt from public copying and inspection for portions of records held by a supervisor of elections which contain network schematics, hardware and software configurations, or encryption, or which identify detection, investigation, or response practices for suspected or confirmed information technology security incidents, if the disclosure of such records would facilitate unauthorized access, modification, disclosure, or destruction of data, information, or IT resources.

This exemption will be repealed on October 2, 2026,²² unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the Florida Constitution. The bill asserts that the unauthorized use of portions of records of a supervisor of elections which contain network schematics, hardware and software configurations, or encryption could be used as a tool to influence elections, frustrate the voting process, manipulate election results, or otherwise

¹⁹ Section 98.015(1), F.S.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Section 119.01(5), F.S.

²² Section 282.318, F.S.

interfere with the administration of elections. If such information is released, it could result in an increase in security breaches and fraud impacting the electoral process.

The bill takes effect upon becoming a law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

The mandate restrictions do not apply because the bill does not require counties and municipalities to spend funds, reduce counties' or municipalities' ability to raise revenue, or reduce the percentage of a state tax shares with counties and municipalities.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

Vote Requirement

Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for passage of a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. Therefore, this bill requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

Public Necessity Statement

Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a bill that creates or expands an exemption to public records disclosure requirements to state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption. Section 2 of the bill contains a statement of public necessity for the exemption.

Breadth of Exemption

Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a newly created record or public meeting exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The bill creates a public records exemption to allow supervisors of elections to exempt records relating to IT security from public disclosures. If such information is released, it could result in security breaches and fraud impacting the electoral process. Thus, the bill does not appear to be in conflict with the constitutional requirement that an exemption be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The private sector will be subject to the cost, to the extent imposed, associated with the agency making redactions in response to public records requests.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill may have a fiscal impact on agencies relating to training or redaction of the newly confidential and exempt information. However, costs are likely minimal.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 98.015 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

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

CS by Governmental Oversight and Accountability on March 31, 2021:

The CS transfers the information amended in the underlying bill from s. 282.318, F.S., to s. 98.015, F.S.

B. Amendments:

None.