

Committee on Governmental Oversight and Accountability

CS/CS/SB 50 — Public Meetings

by Rules Committee; Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee; and Senators Negrón and Evers

Neither the Florida Constitution nor the Sunshine Law specifies that members of the public have the right to speak at public meetings. This bill creates a new section of law that requires members of the public to be given a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a proposition considered by the board or commission of a state agency or local government. Such opportunity does not have to occur at the same meeting at which the board or commission takes official action if certain requirements are met. The bill excludes specified meetings and acts from the opportunity to be heard requirement.

The bill authorizes a board or commission to adopt certain reasonable rules or policies governing the opportunity to be heard. If a board or commission adopts such rules or policies and thereafter complies with them, it is deemed to be acting in compliance with the section.

The bill authorizes a circuit court to issue injunctions for the purpose of enforcing the section upon the filing of an application for such injunction by any citizen of Florida. If such an action is filed and the court determines that the board or commission violated the section, the bill requires the court to assess reasonable attorney fees against the board or commission. The bill also authorizes the court to assess reasonable attorney fees against the individual filing the action if the court finds that the action was filed in bad faith or was frivolous. The bill excludes specified public officers from such attorney fee provisions. If a board or commission appeals a court order finding that it violated the section and the order is affirmed, the bill requires the court to assess reasonable appellate attorney fees against the board or commission.

The bill provides that any action taken by a board or commission that is found to be in violation of the section is not void as a result of such violation.

Finally, the bill includes a legislative finding of important state interest.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2013.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 113-2