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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AS REVISED BY THE
COUNCIL FOR SMARTER GOVERNMENT
ANALYSIS**

BILL #: HB 399 (PCB SA 01-09)
RELATING TO: Public Records Exemption for Certain Information Relating to Emergency Telephone Number "911"
SPONSOR(S): Committee on State Administration and Representative(s) Brummer
TIED BILL(S): None
ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:
(1) STATE ADMINISTRATION YEAS 5 NAYS 0
(2) COUNCIL FOR SMARTER GOVERNMENT YEAS 11 NAYS 0
(3)
(4)
(5)

I. SUMMARY:

The Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995 provides that an exemption from the requirements of the public records or public meetings laws may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and may be no broader than is necessary to meet the public purpose it serves.

Further, the Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995 sets forth a review process which requires that on October 2nd in the fifth year after enactment of a new exemption or "substantial amendment" of an existing exemption, the exemption is to repeal, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption. By June, of the year before the repeal of an exemption, the Division of Statutory Revision of the Office of Legislative Services must certify, to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the language that will repeal and the statutory citation for each exemption scheduled for repeal.

Section 365.171(15), F.S., provides that the name, address, telephone number, or personal information about a person requesting emergency service or reporting an emergency are confidential and exempt from public disclosure. This section was certified by the Division of Statutory Revision and will repeal on October 2, 2001, unless otherwise reenacted by the Legislature.

This bill reenacts s. 365.171(15), F.S., because the release of the name, address, telephone number, or personal information about a person requesting emergency service or reporting an emergency may well jeopardize the health and safety of those needing emergency services in that people, other than emergency service providers, could actually gain access to the scene of the emergency and thereby impede the effective and efficient provision of emergency services. Furthermore, to allow such information to become public could chill the reporting of emergency situations to the detriment of public health and safety.

This bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state or local governments.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. <u>Less Government</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. <u>Lower Taxes</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. <u>Individual Freedom</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. <u>Personal Responsibility</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. <u>Family Empowerment</u> | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

Public Records Law

Florida Constitution

Article I, s. 24(a), Florida Constitution, expresses Florida's public policy regarding access to government records as follows:

Every person has the right to inspect or copy any public records made or received in connection with the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, or persons acting on their behalf, except with respect to records exempted pursuant to this section or specifically made confidential by this Constitution. This section specifically includes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government and each agency or department created thereunder; counties, municipalities, and districts; and each constitutional officer, board, and commission, or entity created pursuant to law or this Constitution.

Article I, s. 24(c), Florida Constitution, does, however, permit the Legislature to provide by general law for the exemption of records from the requirements of s. 24. The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption (public necessity statement) and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.

Article I, s. 24, Florida Constitution, does not set forth any repeal or review requirements.

Florida Statutes

Public policy regarding access to government records is also addressed in the Florida Statutes. Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S., provides:

Every person who has custody of a public record shall permit the record to be inspected and examined by any person desiring to do so, at a reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record or the custodian's designee.

Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995

Section 119.15, F.S., the Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995, provides that an exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and may be no broader than is necessary to meet the public purpose it serves. An identifiable public purpose is served if the exemption meets one of the following purposes, and the Legislature finds that the purpose is sufficiently compelling to override the strong public policy of open government and cannot be accomplished without the exemption:

1. Allows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;
2. Protects information of a sensitive personal nature concerning individuals, the release of which information would be defamatory to such individuals or cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of such individuals or would jeopardize the safety of such individuals. However, in exemptions under this subparagraph, only information that would identify the individuals may be exempted; or
3. Protects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, including, but not limited to, a formula, pattern, device, combination of devices, or compilation of information which is used to protect or further a business advantage over those who do not know or use it, the disclosure of which information would injure the affected entity in the marketplace.

Section 119.15, F.S., sets forth a review process which requires that on October 2nd in the fifth year after enactment of a new exemption or "substantial amendment"¹ of an existing exemption, the exemption is to repeal, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption. By June, of the year before the repeal of an exemption, the Division of Statutory Revision of the Office of Legislative Services must certify, to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the language that will repeal and the statutory citation for each exemption scheduled for repeal. s. 119.15(3)(d), F.S.

Section 365.171(15), F.S., was certified by the Division of Statutory Revision and will repeal on October 2, 2001, unless otherwise reenacted by the Legislature.

Analytical Framework

The Florida Constitution does not require the repeal, review, or reenactment of exemptions; the Open Government Sunset Review Act (s. 119.15, F.S.) does. However, the Open Government Sunset Review Act is a Florida statutory provision created by the Legislature. Accordingly, because one Legislature cannot bind another, the requirements of s. 119.15, F.S., do not have to be met.² Nonetheless, because the certified exemption as found in the

¹ An exemption is "substantially amended" if the amendment **expands** the scope of the exemption to include more records or information or to include meetings as well as records. An exemption is not substantially amended if the amendment narrows the scope of the exemption. s. 119.15(3)(b), F.S.

² The requirements of Article 1, s. 24(c), Florida Constitution, must, however, be met with regard to any exemption created on or after July 1, 1993. See *infra* Florida Constitution.

Florida Statutes actually contains language that repeals the exemption as of October 2nd, 2001, that exemption *will* repeal unless the legislature reenacts the exemption.³

If, and only if, in reenacting an exemption that will repeal, the exemption is expanded (essentially creating a new exemption), then a public necessity statement is required, as a result of the requirements of Article 1, s. 24, Florida Constitution. If the exemption is reenacted with grammatical or stylistic changes (that do not expand the exemption), if the exemption is narrowed, or if an exception to the exemption is created (e.g., allowing another agency access to the exempt records), then a public necessity statement is not required. Article 1, s. 24, Florida Constitution, only requires a public necessity statement when creating an exemption, and also requires that the exemption be in a separate bill.⁴

Emergency Telephone Number “911”

Section 365.171, F.S., the Florida Emergency Telephone Act, establishes and implements “a cohesive statewide emergency telephone number ‘911’ plan” which provides citizens with “rapid direct access to public safety agencies by dialing the telephone number ‘911’ with the objective of reducing the response time to situations requiring law enforcement, fire, medical, rescue, and other emergency services.”

Section 365.171(15), F.S.

In 1989, the Florida Legislature enacted s. 365.171(15), F.S., which exempted from public disclosure

[a]ny record or information obtained by a public agency or a public safety agency for the purpose of providing services in an emergency and which reveals the name, address, or telephone number of any person requesting emergency service or reporting an emergency by accessing an emergency telephone number “911” system.

The law stipulated that the exemption only applied while the information was still in the custody of the agency that received the initial “911” telephone call. (See The Florida Senate Interim Project Report 2001-036, November 2000)

In addition, Attorney General Opinion (AGO) 90-43 reiterated that only that portion of the voice recording of a “911” call relating to the name, address, and telephone number of the caller reporting an emergency or requesting emergency assistance is exempt from the disclosure requirements of chapter 119.07(1), F.S. As a result, the voice recording of a “911” call is subject to disclosure once the name, address, and telephone number of the person placing the call have been deleted. *Id.*

In 1990, the Florida Legislature amended the exemption to include recordings of “911” requests and “personal information about, or information which may identify” persons requesting emergency services or reporting an emergency through the “911” system. *Id.* at 3.

In 1996, the Florida Legislature amended s. 365.171(15), F.S., to remove the provision that limited the application of the exemption to the agency receiving the initial “911” telephone call. This required that the information remain exempt when in the custody of any public agency providing emergency services. Additionally, the 1996 amendment added language to the exemption, in

³ Please note that the effective date of this bill is prior to the repeal date of October 2, 2001.

⁴ If various exemptions are reenacted that do not expand the exemption, then there is no requirement that the exemptions be in separate bills; provided however, that the bill containing the reenactments meets the single subject requirement.

accordance with the provisions of the Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995 (s. 119.15, F.S.) establishing an automatic repeal date.

The Senate Committee on Comprehensive Planning, Local and Military Affairs conducted a survey to assess whether or not the exemption serves an identifiable public purpose. Surveys were sent to 67 county "911" coordinators and to a representative in the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services of the Florida Department of Health (DOH). *Id.* at 3.

Respondents identified the following public purpose of the exemption:

- To maintain the privacy of persons accessing emergency telephone service; disclosure of such private information could discourage persons from using the system;
- To protect callers from harassment, intimidation, injury or retribution by third parties interested in knowing who reported the emergency crime;
- To prevent third parties from benefiting or profiting from such exempt information; and
- To preserve the integrity of investigations. *Id.* at 3.

DOH offered the following additional reasons for maintaining the exemption:

- Persons calling the "911" emergency number system would be reluctant to explain symptoms or health history of a personal sensitive nature if they knew such information was not kept confidential; and
- Persons reporting medical information could mistakenly assume personal information reported to the "911" emergency number system would become part of their medical record and exempt from public access. *Id.* at 4.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

This bill reenacts s. 365.171(15), F.S., verbatim, with one exception. The bill removes the language scheduling the repeal of the exemption for "911" emergency telephone system caller records. By reenacting s. 365.171(15), F.S., the name, address, telephone number, or personal information about a person requesting emergency service or reporting an emergency are confidential and exempt from public disclosure.

The need for emergency services bespeaks a very personal and often traumatizing event. To have this information made publicly available is an invasion of privacy and could jeopardize the health and safety of those needing emergency services in that people, other than emergency service providers, could actually gain access to the scene of the emergency and thereby impede the effective and efficient provision of emergency services. Furthermore, there are those persons, who, for personal, private gain and/or for business purposes, might seek to benefit from individuals in their time of need. Those reporting or needing emergency services should not be subjected to this type of possible harassment. Finally, to allow such information to become public could "chill" the reporting of emergency situations to the detriment of public health and safety. (See CS/SB 1252, s. 2, 1996)

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

See "Effect of Proposed Changes".

III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to spend funds or to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

This bill does not reduce the authority that municipalities or counties have to raise revenues in the aggregate.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

This bill does not reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

V. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

None.

STORAGE NAME: h0399.sgc.doc

DATE: February 20, 2001

PAGE: 7

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

None.

VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON STATE ADMINISTRATION:

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