

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Provide limited government – The bill decreases access to public records.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Public Records Law

Florida has a long history of providing public access to the records of governmental and other public entities. The Legislature enacted its first law affording access to public records in 1909. In 1992, Floridians adopted an amendment to the state constitution that raised the statutory right of access to public records to a constitutional level. Section (24)(a), Art. I of the State Constitution provides that:

Every person has the right to inspect or copy any public record 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.

The Public Records Law ¹ also specifies conditions under which the public must have access to governmental records. Section 119.011(11), F.S., defines the term “public records” to include:

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.

The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted this definition of public records to include all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are used “to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge.”² Unless the Legislature makes these materials exempt, they are open for public inspection, regardless of whether they are in final form.³

Under s. 24(c), Art. I of the State Constitution, the Legislature may provide for the exemption of records from the public records requirements provided: (1) the law creating the exemption states with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption; and (2) the exemption is no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law.

The Open Government Sunset Review Act, s. 119.15, F.S., provides for the review, repeal, and reenactment of an exemption. A new exemption is repealed on the October 2nd in the fifth year after enactment, unless the exemption is reenacted by the Legislature. An exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose, and it may be no broader than necessary to meet that purpose.

¹ Chapter 119, F.S.

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

³ See *Wait v. Florida Power & Light Co.*, 372 So. 2d 420 (Fla. 1979).

Statewide Public Guardianship Office

The Statewide Public Guardianship Office (SPGO) is housed within the Department of Elderly Affairs.⁴ The purpose of the SPGO is to provide public guardians to incapacitated persons for whom there is no family member or friend, other person, bank, or corporation willing and qualified to serve as guardian.⁵ The Legislature also authorized the creation of a direct-support organization to support the SPGO.⁶ The purpose of the direct-support organization is:

to conduct programs and activities; to raise funds; to request and receive grants, gifts, and bequests of moneys; to acquire, receive, hold, invest, and administer, in its own name, securities, funds, objects of value, or other property, real or personal; and to make expenditures to or for the direct or indirect benefit of the Statewide Public Guardianship Office⁷

The bill creates a public records exemption to allow donors and prospective donors to the direct-support organization for the Statewide Public Guardianship Office to remain anonymous, if they wish. The bill provides that the public records exemption is necessary because the release of information identifying donors will adversely affect the direct-support organization.

This bill takes effect July 1, 2006. The public records exemption will automatically repeal on October 2, 2010, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Amends s. 744.7082, F.S., to create a public records exemption for identifying information of persons making a donation to the direct-support organization of the Statewide Public Guardianship Office.

Section 2. Provides for review and future repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2010.

Section 3. Provides a statement of public necessity.

Section 4. Provides for an effective date of July 1, 2006, if HB 457 becomes law.

II. 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.

⁴ Section 744.7021, F.S.

⁵ Section 744.702, F.S.

⁶ Section 744.7082, F.S.

⁷ Section 744.7082(1)(b), F.S.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The public records exemption will allow anonymous donations to the direct-support organization for the Statewide Public Guardianship Office. As such, those donors and potential donors who wish to donate anonymously will no longer be discouraged from donating by public records laws.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The public records law in general creates a significant, although unquantifiable, increase in government spending. Government employees must locate requested records, and must examine every requested record to determine if a public records exemption prohibits release of the record. There is likely no marginal fiscal impact to a single public records exemption; the location and examination process remains whether or not a particular public records exemption exists.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

This bill does not appear to require counties or municipalities to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds, reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenue in the aggregate, nor reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

2. Other:

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution, requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for passage of a newly created public records or public meetings exemption. Thus, the bill requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES