

**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 Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee

**BILL:** PCS/SB 1230 (888594)

**INTRODUCER:** Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee

**SUBJECT:** OGSR/Public Records/Consumer Complaints and Inquiries

**DATE:** February 14, 2012      **REVISED:** \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Rubio	Burgess	BI	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	Seay	Roberts	GO	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**Please see Section VIII. for Additional Information:**

A. COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE.....  Statement of Substantial Changes

B. AMENDMENTS.....  Technical amendments were recommended

Amendments were recommended

Significant amendments were recommended

**I. Summary:**

This proposed committee substitute is the result of the Banking and Insurance Committee’s Open Government Sunset Review of the public records exemption for personal financial and health information held by the Department of Financial Services or the Office of Insurance Regulation, relating to a consumer’s complaint or inquiry regarding a matter or activity regulated under the Florida Insurance Code or s. 440.191, F.S. This exemption will repeal on October 2, 2012, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. This bill reenacts the public records exemption. The PCS also makes editorial changes and allows the protected information to be released to the consumer or the consumer’s legally authorized representative or a person or entity with the express written consent of the consumer or the consumer’s legally authorized representative.

This bill substantially amends section 624.23 of the Florida Statutes.

## II. Present Situation:

### Public Records Law

The State of Florida has a long history of providing public access to governmental records. The Florida Legislature enacted the first public records law in 1892.<sup>1</sup> One hundred years later, Floridians adopted an amendment to the State Constitution that raised the statutory right of access to public records to a constitutional level.<sup>2</sup> Article I, s. 24 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.

In addition to the State Constitution, the Public Records Act,<sup>3</sup> which pre-dates public records provision of the State Constitution, specifies conditions under which public access must be provided to records of an agency.<sup>4</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S., states:

- (a) 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 any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record.

Unless specifically exempted, all agency records are available for public inspection. The term “public record” is broadly defined 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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1390, 1391 F.S. (Rev. 1892).

<sup>2</sup> Article I, s. 24 of the State Constitution.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 119, F.S.

<sup>4</sup> The word “agency” is defined in s. 119.011(2), F.S., to mean “. . . 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.” The Florida Constitution also establishes a right of access to 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 those records exempted by law or the state constitution.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.011(11), F.S.

The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted this definition to encompass all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are used to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge.<sup>6</sup> All such materials, regardless of whether they are in final form, are open for public inspection unless made exempt.<sup>7</sup>

Only the Legislature is authorized to create exemptions to open government requirements.<sup>8</sup> Exemptions must be created by general law and such law must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption. Further, the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law.<sup>9</sup> A bill enacting an exemption<sup>10</sup> may not contain other substantive provisions, although it may contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.<sup>11</sup>

There is a difference between records that the Legislature has made exempt from public inspection and those that are *confidential* and exempt. If the Legislature makes a record confidential and exempt, such information may not be released by an agency to anyone other than to the persons or entities designated in the statute.<sup>12</sup> If a record is simply made exempt from disclosure requirements then an agency is not prohibited from disclosing the record in all circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

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

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (Act)<sup>14</sup> provides for the systematic review, through a 5-year cycle ending October 2 of the 5th year following enactment, of an exemption from the Public Records Act or the Public Meetings Law. Each year, by June 1, the Division of Statutory Revision of the Office of Legislative Services is required to certify to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives the language and statutory citation of each exemption scheduled for repeal the following year.<sup>15</sup>

The Act states that an exemption may be created or expanded only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and if the exemption is no broader than necessary to meet the public purpose it serves. An identifiable public purpose is served if the exemption meets one of three specified criteria and if 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. An exemption meets the three statutory criteria if it:

- Allows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, whose administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;

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<sup>6</sup> *Shevin v. Byron, Harless, Schaffer, Reid and Associates, Inc.*, 379 So.2d 633, 640 (Fla. 1980).

<sup>7</sup> *Wait v. Florida Power & Light Company*, 372 So.2d 420 (Fla. 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Article I, s. 24(c), Fla. Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> *Memorial Hospital-West Volusia v. News-Journal Corporation*, 729 So. 2d 373, 380 (Fla. 1999); *Halifax Hospital Medical Center v. News-Journal Corporation*, 724 So.2d 567 (Fla. 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Under s. 119.15, F.S., an existing exemption may be considered a new exemption if the exemption is expanded to cover additional records.

<sup>11</sup> Art. I, s. 24(c), Fla. Constitution.

<sup>12</sup> Attorney General Opinion 85-62.

<sup>13</sup> *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683, 687 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA), review denied, 589 So.2d 289 (Fla. 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Section 119.15, F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15(5)(a), F.S.

- Protects information of a sensitive, personal nature concerning individuals, the release of which would be defamatory or cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of such individuals, or would jeopardize their safety; or
- Protects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, including, but not limited to, a formula, pattern, device, combination of devices, or compilation of information that is used to protect or further a business advantage over those who do not know or use it, the disclosure of which would injure the affected entity in the marketplace.<sup>16</sup>

The Act also requires consideration of the following:

- 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?

### **Consumer Inquiries and Complaints**

Consumers may file complaints with or make inquiries to the Department of Financial Services (DFS) or the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) concerning an insurance company or other entity regulated by DFS or OIR under the Florida Insurance Code. The Division of Consumer Services of the Department of Financial Services primarily is responsible for receiving inquiries and complaints from consumers and providing direct assistance and advocacy for consumers requesting such assistance or advocacy.<sup>17</sup>

According to DFS, when the department investigates the activities of insurance companies or other regulated entities, policyholders may provide the department with personal information relating to their insurance policies that often includes financial or medical information. Consumers also may contact DFS about problems they have in obtaining insurance coverage, and, as such, might submit medical or financial records. Often, a policyholder who has had an insurance claim denied will request assistance from the Division of Consumer Services. In providing background information relating to the claim, the insured may provide medical records detailing the history of the claim, such as medical records revealing health information supporting why the claim should be paid.

### **Workers' Compensation**

The Division of Workers' Compensation of DFS is responsible for providing information and assistance to injured workers, employers, carriers, health care providers, and managed care arrangements.<sup>18</sup> The Employee Assistance and Ombudsman Office of the Division of Workers' Compensation is charged with the responsibility of facilitating and resolving disputes between an

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<sup>16</sup> Section 119.15(4)(b), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> See s. 20.121(2)(h), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 440, F.S.

employee and the employer or carrier.<sup>19</sup> Frequently, an employee will submit personal financial and medical information to support a claim for benefits or other documentation to assist in the resolution process.

### **Public Records Exemption Under Review**

In 2007, the Legislature reenacted and expanded the public records exemption for certain information regarding a consumer complaint.<sup>20</sup> Personal financial and health information<sup>21</sup> held by DFS or OIR, relating to a consumer's<sup>22</sup> complaint or inquiry regarding a matter or activity regulated under the Florida Insurance Code or s. 440.191, F.S., is confidential and exempt from public records requirements. Current law provides for retroactive application<sup>23</sup> of the exemption.<sup>24</sup>

Such confidential and exempt information may be disclosed to another governmental entity if disclosure is necessary for the receiving entity to perform its duties and responsibilities, and to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.<sup>25</sup>

Pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, the exemption will repeal on October 2, 2012, unless reenacted by the Legislature.<sup>26</sup>

### **Banking and Insurance Committee's Open Government Sunset Review**

Based on an Open Government Sunset Review of the exemption, Senate professional staff of the Banking and Insurance Committee recommended that the Legislature retain the public records exemption in s. 624.23, F.S. This recommendation was made in light of the information gathered for the Sunset Review, which indicated that the requisite public necessity continues to exist in maintaining the exemption. The review found that the exemption is necessary for the effective

<sup>19</sup> See s. 440.191, F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 2007-70, L.O.F.

<sup>21</sup> Section 624.23(1)(b), F.S., defines "personal financial and health information" to mean:

- A consumer's personal health condition, disease, or injury;
- The existence, nature, source, or amount of a consumer's personal income or expenses;
- Records of or relating to a consumer's personal financial transactions of any kind;
- The existence, identification, nature, or value of a consumer's assets, liabilities, or net worth;
- A history of a consumer's personal medical diagnosis or treatment;
- The existence or content or any individual coverage or status under a consumer's beneficial interest in any insurance policy or annuity contract; or
- The existence, identification, nature, or value of a consumer's interest in any insurance policy, annuity contract, or trust.

<sup>22</sup> Section 624.23(1)(a), F.S., defines "consumer" to mean a prospective purchaser, purchaser, or beneficiary of, or applicant for, any product or service regulated under the Florida Insurance Code, and a family member or dependent of a consumer; or an employee seeking assistance from the Employee Assistance and Ombudsman Office under s. 440.191, F.S.

<sup>23</sup> The State Supreme Court has ruled that a public record exemption is not to be applied retroactively unless the legislation clearly expresses intent that such exemption is to be applied retroactively. *Memorial Hospital-West Volusia, Inc. v. News-Journal Corporation*, 729 So.2d 373 (Fla. 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Section 624.23(2), F.S.

<sup>25</sup> Section 624.23(3), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 624.23(4), F.S.

and efficient protection of personal financial and health information against identity theft and other misuse.

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

**Section 1** amends s. 624.23, F.S., reenacting and saving from repeal the public records exemption for a consumer's personal financial and health information held by the Department of Financial Services or the Office of Insurance Regulation. This section also makes editorial changes and allows that the protected information may be disclosed to the consumer or the consumer's legally authorized representative or with the express written consent of the consumer or the consumer's legally authorized representative.

**Section 2** provides an effective date of July 1, 2012.

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

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

None.

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

This bill retains an already-existing public records exemption and thus is not subject to requirement that the exemption must pass with a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature. The bill complies with the requirement of article I, section 24 of the State Constitution that public records exemptions may only be addressed in legislation separate from substantive changes to law.

#### 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. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**PCS (888594) by Governmental Oversight and Accountability – February 17, 2012**

The PCS makes editorial changes and also allows the protected information to be released to the consumer or the consumer’s legally authorized representative or to a person or entity with the express written consent of the consumer or the consumer’s legally authorized representative.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.