

**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.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Ethics and Elections

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BILL: SB 1318

INTRODUCER: Senator Soto

SUBJECT: Public Records/Complaint of Misconduct Against Public Employee

DATE: March 27, 2013

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Roberts	Roberts	EE	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			GO	
3.			RC	
4.				
5.				
6.				

**I. Summary:**

SB 1318 creates a public record exemption for a complaint of misconduct filed with an agency against a public employee with a state agency or a political subdivision of the state, and all information obtained pursuant to the investigation by the agency or political subdivision of the complaint of misconduct. The information is confidential and exempt from public record requirements until the investigation ceases to be active, or until the agency provides written notice to the employee who is the subject of the complaint that the agency concluded the investigation and either will or will not proceed with disciplinary action or file charges.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on July 1, 2018, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. In addition, the bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

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

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2013.

**Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution, requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for final passage of a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates a public record exemption; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.**

This bill substantially amends section 119.071, Florida Statutes.

## II. Present Situation:

### Public Records and Meetings Requirements

The Florida Constitution specifies requirements for public access to government records and meetings. It provides every person 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 of persons acting on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> The records of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches are specifically included.<sup>2</sup> The Florida Constitution also requires all meetings of any collegial public body of the executive branch of state government or of any local government, at which official acts are to be taken or at which public business of such body is to be transacted or discussed, to be open and noticed to the public.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes specify conditions under which public access must be provided to government records and meetings. The Public Records Act<sup>4</sup> guarantees every person's right to inspect and copy any state or local government public record<sup>5</sup> at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record.<sup>6</sup> The Sunshine Law<sup>7</sup> requires all meetings of any board or commission of any state or local agency or authority at which official acts are to be taken to be noticed and open to the public.<sup>8</sup>

Only the Legislature may create an exemption to public records or public meetings requirements.<sup>9</sup> Such an exemption must be created by general law and must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption.<sup>10</sup> Further, the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. A bill enacting an exemption may not

<sup>1</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(b).

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 119, F.S.

<sup>5</sup> 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." Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines "agency" to mean as "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 Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records (*see Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So.2d 32 (Fla. 1992)).

<sup>6</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 286.011, F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 286.011(1)-(2), F.S. The Sunshine Law does not apply to the Legislature; rather, open meetings requirements for the Legislature are set out in Art. III, s. 4(e) of the Florida Constitution. That section requires the rules of procedure of each house to provide that:

- All legislative committee and subcommittee meetings of each house and of joint conference committee meetings must be open and noticed to the public; and
- All prearranged gatherings, between more than two members of the Legislature, or between the Governor, the President of the Senate, or the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the purpose of which is to agree upon or to take formal legislative action, must be reasonably open to the public.

<sup>9</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>10</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

contain other substantive provisions<sup>11</sup> and must pass by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature.<sup>12</sup>

Exemptions are subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act,<sup>13</sup> which prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings exemptions.<sup>14</sup> It requires the automatic repeal of such exemption on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.<sup>15</sup>

### **Public Records Exemptions Relating to Complaints of Misconduct and Investigations**

State law provides limited exemptions from public record requirements for information relating to complaints of misconduct and investigations carried out by agencies in certain contexts. For example, a complaint filed against a law enforcement officer, and all information obtained pursuant to the investigation of the complaint by the agency, is confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., until the investigation ceases to be active or until the agency head or designee informs the subject of the complaint that the agency will or will not proceed with disciplinary action or the filing of charges.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, a complaint filed against an individual certified by the Department of Education, and all information obtained pursuant to the investigation of the complaint by the agency, is confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., until the conclusion of the preliminary investigation of the complaint, until such time as the preliminary investigation ceases to be active, or until such time as otherwise provided by s. 1012.798(6), F.S.<sup>17</sup> However, there is no general exemption for information obtained pursuant to an investigation following a complaint of misconduct filed against a public employee.

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

This bill creates a public record exemption for certain information pertaining to a complaint of misconduct filed against a public employee with a state agency or a political subdivision of the state. Specifically, the complaint and all information obtained pursuant to the investigation of the complaint by the agency<sup>18</sup> is confidential and exempt<sup>19</sup> from public record requirements until the:

<sup>11</sup> The bill may, however, contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

<sup>12</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>13</sup> Section 119.15, F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 119.15, F.S. 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 (s. 119.15(4)(b), F.S.). The requirements of the Act do not apply to an exemption that is required by federal law or that applies solely to the Legislature or the State Court System (s. 119.15(2), F.S.).

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 112.533(2), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 1012.796(4), F.S. Section 1012.798(6), F.S. does not provide any additional limit on the duration of the exemption.

<sup>18</sup> Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines the term "agency" 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 chapter 119, F.S., 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.

<sup>19</sup> There is a difference between records the Legislature designates as exempt from public record requirements and those the Legislature deems confidential and exempt. A record classified as exempt from public disclosure may be disclosed under

- Investigation ceases to be active;
- Agency provides written notice to the employee who is the subject of the complaint that the agency concluded the investigation with a finding not to proceed with disciplinary action or file charges; or
- Agency provides written notice to the employee who is the subject of the complaint that the agency concluded the investigation with a finding to proceed with disciplinary action or file charges.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on July 1, 2018, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature.

In addition, the bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

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

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

Not applicable. This bill does not appear to require counties or municipalities to spend funds or take action requiring the expenditure of funds; reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenues in the aggregate; or reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

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

###### **Vote Requirement**

Section 24(c), Art. I of the Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature for passage of a newly created public records or public meetings exemption. Because this bill creates new public records and meetings exemptions, it requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

###### **Public Necessity Statement**

Section 24(c), Art. I of the Florida Constitution requires a public necessity statement for a newly created public records or public meetings exemption. Because this bill creates new public records and meetings exemptions, it includes a public necessity statement.

###### **Single Subject**

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a newly created public record or public meeting exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The bill creates a public record exemption of limited duration for a complaint of misconduct filed with a state agency or political subdivision of the state against an agency employee, and all information obtained pursuant to the investigation of

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certain circumstances. See *WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), review denied 892 So.2d 1015 (Fla. 2004); *City of Riviera Beach v. Barfield*, 642 So.2d 1135 (Fla. 4th DCA 1994); *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991). If the Legislature designates a record as confidential and exempt from public disclosure, such record may not be released, by the custodian of public records, to anyone other than the persons or entities specifically designated in the statutory exemption. See Attorney General Opinion 85-62 (August 1, 1985).

the complaint by the agency. The purpose of the exemption is to facilitate the investigation of such complaints, and the exemption does not extend past the duration of such an investigation. The exemption does not appear to be in conflict with the constitutional requirement that the exemption be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill could create a minimal fiscal impact on agencies because staff responsible for complying with public record requests could require training related to the expansion of the public records exemption. In addition, those agencies could incur costs associated with redacting confidential and exempt information prior to releasing a record. Such costs, however, would be absorbed, as they are part of the day-to-day responsibilities of the agencies.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

Chapter 119, F.S., defines “agency” to include political subdivisions of the state. The terminology “state agency or political subdivision of the state” may be redundant, and therefore could be simplified to “agency” to ensure consistency with other public records exemptions created in chapter 119, F.S.

In accordance with the Open Government Sunset Review Act, the bill should be amended to provide for the automatic repeal of the exemption to occur on *October 2, 2018*, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.

**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.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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