

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 7095 PCB IBS 13-02 Public Records/Citizens Property Insurance Corporation Clearinghouse Program

SPONSOR(S): Insurance & Banking Subcommittee, Nelson

TIED BILLS: HB 7093 **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 1606

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
Orig. Comm.: Insurance & Banking Subcommittee	13 Y, 0 N	Callaway	Cooper
1) Government Operations Subcommittee	12 Y, 0 N	Harrington	Williamson

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Citizens Property Insurance Corporation (Citizens) is a state-created, not-for-profit, tax-exempt governmental entity whose public purpose is to provide property insurance coverage to those unable to find affordable coverage in the voluntary admitted market. Although it operates like a private insurance company, it is not a private insurance company. As of February 28, 2013, Citizens is the largest property insurer in Florida with almost 1.3 million policies and over \$406 billion in exposure.

Current law allows homeowners with offers for property insurance from an insurer in the private market to nonetheless obtain insurance from Citizens if certain Citizens' eligibility requirements are met. One major requirement for Citizens is a 15 percent premium restriction. This restriction prohibits a homeowner from buying insurance in Citizens if an insurer in the private market offers the homeowner insurance for a premium that is up to 15 percent more than the Citizens' premium. Thus, a homeowner can buy insurance from Citizens only if the private insurer's premium is more than 15 percent than the Citizens' premium. There is no mechanism for any insurance agent to check with all insurers in the private market to see if any will write insurance within the premium restriction. This likely allows policies to be written by Citizens even though an insurer will write the policy for a premium within 15 percent points of the Citizens' premium. Additionally, homeowners can circumvent the premium eligibility restriction and buy insurance in Citizens even when an insurer in the private market will write insurance within the restriction by shopping for property insurance with multiple agents.

House Bill 7093 establishes a clearinghouse program (clearinghouse) for use by Citizens before property insurance can be written or renewed by Citizens. The purpose of the clearinghouse is to ensure that only property meeting the Citizens' premium eligibility restrictions obtains insurance in Citizens. All applications for new insurance and all policies to be renewed in Citizens must be submitted to the clearinghouse to determine if the policy can be written or renewed by a private property insurer within the premium eligibility restrictions. Insurers are not required to participate in the clearinghouse. House Bill 7093 also implements a 5 percent premium eligibility restriction for policies renewed by Citizens.

This bill provides that underwriting guidelines, manuals, rating information, or other underwriting criteria or instructions submitted by an insurer to the Citizens' clearinghouse program that are used by the clearinghouse to identify and select risks from the clearinghouse are confidential and exempt from public records requirements.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2018, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. It also provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

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 records exemption. The bill creates a new public record exemption; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Background

Public Records Law

Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records. The section guarantees every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The Legislature, however, may provide by general law for the exemption of records from the requirements of Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution. 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. A bill enacting an exemption or substantially amending an existing exemption may not contain other substantive provisions, although it may contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.¹

Public policy regarding access to government records is addressed further in the Florida Statutes. Section 119.07(1), F.S., guarantees every person a right to inspect and copy any state, county, or municipal record. Furthermore, the Open Government Sunset Review Act² provides that a public record exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose. In addition, it may be no broader than is necessary to meet one of the following purposes:

- Allows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption.
- Protects sensitive personal information that, if released, would be defamatory or would jeopardize an individual's safety; however, only the identity of an individual may be exempted under this provision.
- Protects trade or business secrets.

Citizens Property Insurance Corporation

Citizens Property Insurance Corporation (Citizens) is a state-created, not-for-profit, tax-exempt governmental entity whose public purpose is to provide property insurance coverage to those unable to find affordable coverage in the voluntary admitted market. Although it operates like a private insurance company, it is not a private insurance company. As of February 28, 2013, Citizens is the largest property insurer in Florida with almost 1.3 million policies and over \$406 billion in exposure.³ Citizens insures over 444,000 residential and commercial policies in Florida's coastal areas and over 835,000 residential policies in Florida's non-coastal areas. The remaining policies are commercial policies insured in Florida's non-coastal areas.⁴

Current law allows homeowners with offers for property insurance from an insurer in the private market to still obtain insurance from Citizens if certain Citizens' eligibility requirements are met and requires Citizens to have a procedure to determine the eligibility of a potential risk. A major eligibility requirement for insurance in Citizens provided in current law is a 15 percent premium restriction. This restriction prohibits a homeowner from buying insurance in Citizens if an insurer in the private market offers the homeowner insurance for a premium that is up to 15 percent more than the Citizens' premium. In addition, the coverage offered by the private insurer must be comparable to Citizens' coverage. Thus, a homeowner can buy insurance from Citizens only if the private insurer's premium is more than 15 percent than the Citizens' premium.

¹ Section 24(c), Art. I of the State Constitution.

² Section 119.15, F.S.

³ <https://www.citizensfla.com/about/corpfinaancials.cfm> (last viewed March 22, 2013).

⁴ *Id.*

Currently, an insurance agent selling a property insurance policy checks with the insurers in the private market represented by the agent to see if any of them will write the policy for a premium up to 15 percent more than the Citizens' premium. If an insurer will do that, the agent puts the policy with that insurer. However, the agent can only check with the insurers he or she represents and because captive agents represent only one insurer, these agents can only check with one insurer. There is no mechanism for any agent, either captive or not, to check with all insurers in the private market to see if any will write insurance within the premium restriction. This likely allows policies to be written by Citizens even though an insurer will write the policy for a premium up to 15 percent more than the Citizens' premium.

Additionally, homeowners can circumvent the premium eligibility restriction and buy insurance in Citizens even when an insurer in the private market will write insurance within the restriction by shopping for property insurance with multiple agents. If one agent denies the homeowner insurance in Citizens because he or she represents a private insurer that will write the policy for a premium up to 15 percent more than the Citizens' premium, the homeowner can go to a different agent. If that agent does not represent a private insurer willing to write the policy within the 15 percent premium eligibility restriction, the agent can place the policy into Citizens. Thus, the policy goes into Citizens even though there is a private insurer willing to write it within the 15 percent premium restriction simply because the agent selling the policy does not represent that private insurer.

House Bill 7093

House Bill 7093 establishes a clearinghouse program (clearinghouse) for use by Citizens before property insurance can be written or renewed by Citizens. The purpose of the clearinghouse is to ensure only property meeting the Citizens' premium eligibility restrictions obtains insurance in Citizens. The bill also implements a five percent premium eligibility restriction for policies renewed by Citizens.

All applications for insurance in Citizens and all policies to be renewed in Citizens must be submitted to the clearinghouse to determine if the policy can be written or renewed by a property insurer operating in the private market within the statutory premium eligibility restrictions of 15 percent for new insurance applications and five percent for renewals. Insurers are not required to participate in the clearinghouse.

When an application for insurance in Citizens is submitted to the clearinghouse, the insurers participating in the clearinghouse have 48 hours to select the property to insure. If the 48 hour period expires and no insurer has elected to insure the property, Citizens will insure it. If the property is selected by an insurer and the premium offered by the insurer is within the statutory premium eligibility guideline for new applications, then the homeowner is not eligible for insurance in Citizens. If more than one insurer offers insurance within the guideline, the homeowner can choose from which insurer to purchase insurance. If an insurer offers to write insurance, but the premium is more than the guideline, then the homeowner can choose to buy insurance with the insurer or buy insurance with Citizens.

The same clearinghouse submission and selection process applies to Citizens' renewals, but there is no 48 hour waiting period. Citizens' renewals will be submitted to the clearinghouse for selection during the time period provided by law for notifying the policyholder their policy is being renewed, which is 45 days before renewal. If property insured by Citizens is up for renewal and is selected from the clearinghouse by an insurer with a premium from the insurer within the statutory renewal premium eligibility guidelines, then the homeowner is not eligible to renew insurance in Citizens. If more than one insurer offers insurance at premiums within the renewal guideline, the homeowner can choose from which insurer to purchase insurance. If an insurer offers to write insurance, but the premium is more than the renewal guideline, then the homeowner can choose to buy insurance with the insurer or renew their insurance with Citizens.

Surplus lines insurers⁵ can also participate in the clearinghouse. A surplus lines insurer cannot offer to insure a property if a Florida licensed insurer⁶ makes an offer. Unlike offers of insurance made to

⁵ Surplus lines insurance refers to a category of insurance for which there is no market available through standard insurance carriers in the admitted market (insurance companies licensed to transact insurance in Florida). Surplus lines insurers are not "authorized" insurers as defined in the Florida Insurance Code and thus do not obtain a certificate of authority from the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) to transact insurance in Florida. Rather, surplus lines insurers are "unauthorized" insurers, but are eligible to transact

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homeowners through the clearinghouse from Florida licensed insurers, if a homeowner receives an offer of insurance through the clearinghouse from a surplus lines insurer within the Citizens' premium eligibility restrictions, the homeowner can still be insured by Citizens if they choose. Likewise, homeowners can choose to have their insurance renewed in Citizens even if they receive an offer of insurance from a surplus lines insurer within the renewal premium eligibility guidelines.

Effect of the Bill

The bill provides that underwriting guidelines, manuals, rating information, or other underwriting criteria or instructions submitted by an insurer to the Citizens' clearinghouse that are used by the clearinghouse to identify and select risks from the clearinghouse are confidential and exempt⁷ from public records requirements.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2018, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. It also provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.⁸

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1: Amends s. 627.3518, F.S., providing an exemption from public records requirements for all underwriting guidelines, manuals, rating information, and other underwriting criteria or instructions submitted by an insurer to the corporation's policyholder eligibility clearinghouse program which are used to identify and select risks from the program; provides for future review and repeal of the exemption under the Open Government Sunset Review Act.

Section 2: Provides a statement of public necessity.

Section 3: Provides an effective date that is contingent upon the passage of HB 7093 or similar legislation creating s. 627.3518, F.S., the Citizens' clearinghouse takes effect, if such legislation is adopted in the same legislative session or an extension thereof and 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:

surplus lines insurance under the surplus lines law as "eligible surplus insurers". OIR determines whether a surplus lines insurer is "eligible" based on statutory guidelines.

⁶ An admitted insurer is one licensed to transact insurance in Florida.

⁷ 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 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).

⁸ Section 24(c), Art. I of the State Constitution.

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

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

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. This bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

Vote Requirement

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 exemption. The bill creates a new public record exemption; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for passage.

Public Necessity Statement

Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution, requires a public necessity statement justifying a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates a new public record exemption; thus, it contains a public necessity statement.

Breadth of Exemption

Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution, requires that an exemption be no broader than necessary to accomplish its stated purpose. Based on the statement of public necessity, it appears that the exemption is no broader than necessary to accomplish its stated purpose.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.