

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 Committee on Governmental Oversight and Accountability

BILL: SB 1108
INTRODUCER: Community Affairs Committee
SUBJECT: OGSR/Children of Agency Officers and Employees/Identifying Information
DATE: March 25, 2014 **REVISED:** _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	Stearns	Yeatman		CA SPB 7042 as introduced
1.	Kim	McVaney	GO	Favorable
2.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 1108 continues the public records exemption for the personal identifying information of an agency employee’s dependent child covered by an agency insurance plan. The exemption is scheduled to repeal on October 2, 2014, unless saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

II. Present Situation:

Public Access

Florida has a long history of providing public access to the records of governmental and other public entities. In 1992, Florida voters approved an amendment to the State Constitution which raised the statutory right of access to public records to a constitutional level.

Section 24, Art. I of the State Constitution provides in pertinent part:

(a) 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.

...

(c) This section shall be self-executing. The legislature, however, may provide by general law passed by a two-thirds vote of each house for the exemption of records from the requirements of subsection (a) and the exemption of meetings from the requirements of

subsection (b); provided that such law shall state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption and shall be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. . . . Laws enacted pursuant to this subsection shall contain only exemptions from the requirements of subsections (a) and (b) and provisions governing the enforcement of this section, and shall relate to one subject.

Florida's Public Records Law

Most of Florida's public records law is contained in chapter 119, F.S., and specifies conditions under which the public must be given access to governmental records. Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S., provides that every person who has custody of a public record¹ must permit the record to be inspected and examined by any person, at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record. Unless specifically exempted, all agency² records are to be available for public inspection.

Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines the term "public record" 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 to encompass all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are "intended to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge."³

Only the Legislature is authorized to create exemptions to open government requirements.⁴ 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.⁵ A bill enacting an exemption⁶ may not contain other substantive provisions although it may contain multiple exemptions relating to one subject.⁷

There is a difference between records that the Legislature exempts from public inspection and those that the Legislature makes confidential and exempt from public inspection. If a record is made confidential, such record may not be released by an agency to anyone other than the person

¹ Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines "public record" to include "all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, film, 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."

² Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines "agency" as "...any state, county, district, authority, or municipal officer, department, division, 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."

³ *Shevin v. Byron, Harless, Shafer, Reid, and Assocs., Inc.*, 379 So.2d 633, 640 (Fla. 1980).

⁴ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

⁵ *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).

⁶ Section 119.15, F.S., provides that an existing exemption may be considered a new exemption if the exemption is expanded to cover additional records.

⁷ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

or entities designated in the statute.⁸ If a record is simply exempt from mandatory disclosure requirements, an agency is not prohibited from disclosing the record in all circumstances.⁹

Open Government Sunset Review Act

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (the Act) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings exemptions.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

The Act provides that a public records or open meetings exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and is no broader than is necessary to meet such public purpose.¹² An exemption serves an identifiable purpose if it meets one of the following purposes *and* the Legislature finds that the purpose of the exemption outweighs open government policy and cannot be accomplished without the exemption:

- It allows the state or its political subdivision to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;
- It 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; or
- It protects trade or business secrets.¹³

The Act also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.¹⁴

When reenacting an exemption that will repeal, a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required if the exemption is expanded.¹⁵ A public necessity statement and a

⁸ There is a difference between records the Legislature designates as exempt from public records requirements and those the Legislature designates *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 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), review denied 892 So.2d 1015 (Fla. 2004). See Attorney General Opinion 85-62, August 1, 1985.

⁹ *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683, 687 (Fla. 5th DCA), review denied, 589 So.2d. 289 (Fla.1991).

¹⁰ 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.).

¹¹ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

¹² Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S. The specified questions are:

- 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?

¹⁵ An exemption is expanded when it is amended to include more records, information, or meetings or to include meetings as well as records, or records as well as meetings.

two-thirds vote for passage are not required if the exemption is reenacted with grammatical or stylistic changes that do not expand the exemption, if the exemption is narrowed, or if an exception¹⁶ to the exemption is created.¹⁷

Exemption of Personal Identifying Information of the Dependent Children of Agency Personnel

In 2009, the Legislature amended s. 119.071(4)(b), F.S., to create a public records exemption for the personal identifying information of a dependent child of a current or former agency employee covered by an agency health insurance plan. This exemption makes a dependent's personal identifying information exempt from public inspection and copying.

The exemption was created after a court ordered a school board to release information in response to a public records request for employees' health insurance policy information and the name, address, gender, age, title and telephone numbers of dependent children covered by the policy.¹⁸

This exemption will expire on October 2, 2014, pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, unless saved by reenactment by the Legislature.

In the summer of 2013, a survey of Florida agencies conducted by Senate and House committee staff found overwhelming support for the public records exemption with a number of responses indicating that the law provided important protection from identity theft for the family members of agency employees.¹⁹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 119.071, F.S., to remove the scheduled repeal of the public records exemption for the personal identifying information of a dependent child of an agency employee. As a result, the records will remain exempt from disclosure requirements under the public records laws.

Section 2 provides the bill takes effect on October 1, 2014.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

¹⁶ An example of an exception to a public records exemption would be allowing an additional agency access to confidential and exempt records.

¹⁷ See *State of Florida v. Ronald Knight*, 661 So.2d 344 (Fla. 4th DCA 1995) (holding that nothing in s. 24, art. I of the Florida Constitution requires exceptions to a public records exemption to contain a public necessity statement).

¹⁸ *Chandler v. School Board of Polk County*, Case No. 2008CA-004389 (Fla. 10th Jud. Cir. 2008).

¹⁹ On file with the Senate Committee on Community Affairs.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

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 does not create or expand a public records exemption, therefore it does not require a two-thirds vote for final passage.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The continued existence of the public records exemption may protect the family members of agency employees from identity theft.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 119.071 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.