

**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 1514

INTRODUCER: Senator Evers

SUBJECT: Public Records/E-mail Addresses of Voter Registration Applicants and Voters

DATE: March 12, 2014

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fox	Roberts	EE	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	_____	_____	GO	_____
3.	_____	_____	RC	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1514 provides that the e-mail address of a voter registration applicant or a voter, which is obtained for voter registration purposes, is confidential and exempt from public record requirements; Governor Scott vetoed the same bill last year. That bill was linked to a paper reduction act that became law on October 1, 2013, which amended the uniform statewide voter registration application to include a field for a voter registration applicant's e-mail address. As a result, the state voter registration form now solicits e-mail addresses, but the law does not protect them from disclosure.

This public records issue is part of the Florida Association of Supervisors of Elections' 2014 legislative package.

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.

Because this bill creates a new public records exemption, it requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature for final passage.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Public Records Laws**

The State Constitution 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 Statutes also specify conditions under which public access must be provided to government records. The Public Records Act<sup>3</sup> guarantees every person's right to inspect and copy any state or local government public record<sup>4</sup> at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record.<sup>5</sup>

Only the Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.<sup>6</sup> Such an exemption must be created by general law and must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption.<sup>7</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 contain other substantive provisions<sup>8</sup> and must pass by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</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>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>4</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>5</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c). 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); *City of Riviera Beach v. Barfield*, 642 So.2d 1135 (Fla. 4th DCA 2004); and *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).

<sup>7</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>8</sup> The bill may, however, contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

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

<sup>10</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>11</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

## **Voter Registration**

Current law requires the Department of State to prescribe by rule a uniform statewide voter registration application.<sup>13</sup> The application must elicit certain information from the voter applicant, such as the applicant's name, date of birth, and address of legal residence.<sup>14</sup>

## **Public Record Exemption for Voter Registration Information**

Current law also provides a public record exemption for certain information held by an agency<sup>15</sup> for purposes of voter registration.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the following information is confidential and exempt<sup>17</sup> from public record requirements:

- All declinations to register to vote made pursuant to ss. 97.057 and 97.058, F.S.
- Information relating to the place where a person registered to vote or where a person updated a voter registration.
- The social security number, driver's license number, and Florida identification number of a voter registration applicant or voter.

In addition, the signature of a voter registration applicant or a voter is exempt from copying requirements.<sup>18</sup>

The public record exemption applies to information held by an agency before, on, or after the effective date of the exemption.<sup>19</sup>

## **Governor's Veto (2013)**

Governor Scott vetoed this bill last year (CS/HB 249 [2013]), despite it having passed the Legislature with only one "no" vote in each chamber. The veto message provides in pertinent part:

This bill seeks to create a public records exemption for email addresses obtained as part of the voter registration process. The mailing addresses of Florida's registered voters

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<sup>13</sup> Section 97.052(1), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> Section 97.052(2), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> The exemption applies to information held by an agency as defined in s. 119.011, F.S. Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines "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 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."

<sup>16</sup> Section 97.0585, F.S.

<sup>17</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 certain circumstances. (*See WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA 2004), review denied 892 So.2d 1015 (Fla. 2004); *City of Riviera Beach v. Barfield*, 642 So.2d 1135 (Fla. 4<sup>th</sup> DCA 1994); *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 687 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> 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).

<sup>18</sup> Section 97.0585(2), F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 97.0585(4), F.S.

have traditionally been part of the public record as a means of delivering important information on election-related issues, and to facilitate communication from elected officials to their constituents. In the modern age of electronic communications, email is increasingly the most convenient and efficient means to receive information that was previously sent through the mail. In order to ensure that voters continue to have efficient access to election-related materials and information, it is essential to keep these channels of communication open to the public.<sup>20</sup>

The public records exemption that the Governor vetoed was linked to a 2013 paper reduction act that modified the uniform statewide voter registration application to include, as of October 1, 2013, a field for a voter registration applicant's email address (and an indication of whether the applicant wishes to receive sample ballots by e-mail).<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the statewide voter registration form now solicits e-mail addresses that are allowed to be made public.

This public records issue is part of the Florida Association of Supervisors of Elections' 2014 legislative package.

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

This bill expands the current public record exemption for voter registration information. It provides that the e-mail address of a voter registration applicant or voter, which is obtained for voter registration purposes, is confidential and exempt from public record requirements.

Current law provides for retroactive application of the public record exemption for voter registration information.

The bill provides that the exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will repeal on October 2, 2018, unless reviewed and reenacted by the Legislature.

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

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

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

None.

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

None.

#### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

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<sup>20</sup> Governor Scott's Veto Letter, CS/HB 249 (14 June 2013), available at: <http://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Veto-Letter-HB-249.pdf>, last accessed on 12 March 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. 2013-192, s. 1, LAWS OF FLA. (CS/CS/HB 247)

**D. Other Constitutional Issues:****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 or public meeting exemption. The bill expands the current public record exemption for voter information; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.

**Public Necessity Statement**

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a public necessity statement for a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. The bill expands the current public record exemption for voter information; thus, it includes a public necessity statement.

**Breadth of Exemption**

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 limited to the email address of a voter or voter registration applicant. 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.

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

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The bill likely could create a minimal fiscal impact on agencies, because staff responsible for complying with public record requests could require training related to expansion of the public record exemption. In addition, those agencies could incur costs associated with redacting 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 the agency.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

A bill drafting error on line 53, identifying that the new exemption is scheduled to expire without further legislative action in “2018,” should be corrected to read “2019” — to conform to the 5-year sunset provision of the Open Government Sunset Review Act.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 97.0585 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.

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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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