

**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 Governmental Oversight and Accountability

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BILL: SB 1284

INTRODUCER: Senator Soto

SUBJECT: Administrative Procedures

DATE: March 16, 2015

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Peacock	McVaney	GO	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			AGG	
3.			AP	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1284 amends s. 120.53, F.S., to revise requirements governing the maintenance and listing of all agency final orders. The bill requires a state agency to upload specified final orders rendered on or after July 1, 2015, to the electronic database of the Division of Administrative Hearings (DOAH) within 90 days of rendering such order. The bill provides database requirements for DOAH.

The bill also requires that each state agency maintain a list of all final orders that are not required to be uploaded to DOAH's electronic database. A state agency must maintain a subject-matter index for final orders rendered before July 15, 2015, and identify the location of this index on the agency's website.

Additionally, SB 1284 requires an agency to permanently maintain all final orders that are electronically uploaded to DOAH as provided by this bill. The Department of State (DOS) is required to adopt rules regarding the maintenance of agency final order, but is no longer required to adopt rules governing the indexing of such orders.

Further, SB 1284 amends s. 120.53, F.S., to continue the exemption of technical assistance advisements issued by the Department of Revenue from the final order maintenance requirements of s. 120.53, F.S.

## II. Present Situation:

### Administrative Procedure Act

Chapter 120, F.S., known as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA),<sup>1</sup> regulates administrative rulemaking, administrative enforcement and administrative resolution of disputes arising out of administrative actions of most state agencies and some subdivisions of state government. The term “agency” is defined in s. 120.52(1), F.S., as:

- Each state officer and state department, and departmental unit described in s. 20.04, F.S.<sup>2</sup>
- The Board of Governors of the State University System, the Commission on Ethics and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission when acting pursuant to statutory authority derived from the Legislature.
- A regional water supply authority.
- A regional planning agency.
- A multicounty special district with a majority of its governing board comprised of non-elected persons.
- Educational units.
- Each entity described in chs. 163 (Intergovernmental Programs), 373 (Water Resources), 380 (Land and Water Management), and 582 (Soil and Water Conservation), F.S., and s. 186.504 (regional planning councils), F.S.
- Other units of government in the state, including counties and municipalities, to the extent they are expressly made subject to the act by general or special law or existing judicial decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The definition of “agency” also includes the Governor<sup>4</sup> in the exercise of all executive powers other than those derived from the State Constitution.

Administrative actions authorized by law and regulated by the APA include adoption of a rule,<sup>5</sup> granting or denying a permit or license, an order enforcing a law or rule that assesses a fine or other discipline and final decisions in administrative disputes or other matters resulting in an agency decision. Such disputes include challenges to the validity of a rule or proposed rule or challenges to agency reliance on unadopted rules,<sup>6</sup> as well as challenges to other proposed agency actions which affect substantial interests of any party.<sup>7</sup> In addition to disputes, agency action occurs when the agency acts on a petition for a declaratory statement<sup>8</sup> or settles a dispute through mediation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 120.51, F.S.

<sup>2</sup> Section 20.04, F.S., sets the structure of the executive branch of state government.

<sup>3</sup> The definition of agency expressly excludes certain legal entities or organizations found in chs. 343, 348, 349 and 361, F.S., and ss. 339.175 and 163.01(7), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Section 120.52(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Section 120.54, F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 120.56, F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 120.569, F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 120.565, F.S.

<sup>9</sup> Section 120.573, F.S.

## Agency Final Orders

Section 120.52(7), F.S., defines the term “final order,” in pertinent part, as “a written final decision which results from a proceeding under s. 120.56,<sup>10</sup> s. 120.565,<sup>11</sup> s. 120.569,<sup>12</sup> s. 120.57,<sup>13</sup> s. 120.573,<sup>14</sup> or s. 120.574<sup>15</sup> which is not a rule, and which is not excepted from the definition of a rule, and which has been filed with the agency clerk, and includes final agency actions which are affirmative, negative, injunctive, or declaratory in form. A final order includes all materials explicitly adopted in it.”

The APA requires agencies to “maintain” all final orders (with certain exceptions) and a hierarchical subject-matter index thereof, allowing orders to be located and publicly accessed for research or copying.<sup>16</sup> One purpose of the requirement was to enhance public notice of agency policy expressed in precedents.<sup>17</sup> In lieu of the requirement for making available for public inspection and copying a hierarchical subject-matter index of agency orders, the APA authorizes agencies to maintain an electronic database of final orders that allow public users to research and retrieve the full text of final orders using common logical search terms.<sup>18</sup>

Currently state agencies must index the following, within 120 days of rendering:<sup>19</sup>

- Each final order resulting from a proceeding under s. 120.57 or s. 120.573.
- Each final agency order rendered pursuant to s. 120.57(4)<sup>20</sup> which contains a statement of agency policy that may be the basis of future agency decisions or that may otherwise contain a statement of precedential value.
- Each declaratory statement issued by an agency.
- Each final order resulting from a proceeding under s. 120.56 or s. 120.574.

Agency final orders may be maintained in hard copy in agency files, published by a reporter<sup>21</sup> or made available online in an electronic database. These various methods can make finding agency

<sup>10</sup> Section 120.56, F.S., provides procedures for challenging the validity of an agency’s existing rule, proposed rule, agency statements defined as rules, and emergency rules.

<sup>11</sup> Section 120.565, F.S., governs procedures for requesting a declaratory statement from an agency by a substantially affected person regarding the applicability of a statutory provision, or of any rule or order of the agency, as it applies to the person’s particular set of circumstances.

<sup>12</sup> Section 120.569, F.S., governs procedures which affect substantial interests.

<sup>13</sup> Section 120.57, F.S., provides additional procedures for particular cases regarding hearings involving disputed issues of material fact and hearings not involving disputed issues of material fact.

<sup>14</sup> Section 120.573, F.S., governs procedures for the mediation of disputes of agency action that affects substantial interests.

<sup>15</sup> Section 120.574, F.S., governs summary hearing procedures.

<sup>16</sup> Section 120.53(1)(a)2.a., F.S.

<sup>17</sup> *McDonald v. Department of Banking and Finance*, 346 So.2d 569, 582 (1<sup>st</sup> DCA 1977). Also, see *Gessler v. Dep’t of Bus. & Prof. Reg.*, 627 So.2d 501, 503 (Fla. 4<sup>th</sup> DCA 1993) (“Persons have the right to examine agency precedent and the right to know the factual basis and policy reasons for agency action.”).

<sup>18</sup> Section 120.53(1)(a)2.b., F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 120.53(1)(b), F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Section 120.57(4), F.S., provides that “[u]nless precluded by law, informal disposition may be made of any proceeding by stipulation, agreed settlement, or consent order.”

<sup>21</sup> Section 120.53(2)(a), F.S., provides, in part, that “[a]n agency may comply with subparagraphs (1)(a)1. and 2. by designating an official reporter to publish and index by subject matter each agency order that must be indexed and made available to the public . . .”

final orders difficult at time. The Ad Hoc Orders Access Committee of the Florida Bar's Administrative Law Section surveyed state agencies to gather information on how agencies index final orders and where final orders may be accessed.<sup>22</sup> The survey revealed that some agencies still require a public records request to access their index and copies of final orders, or they simply identify a particular agency employee to contact for access. Such methods are not always in keeping with the information age. Florida's public records law require agencies to permanently maintain records of agency final orders.<sup>23</sup>

### **Coordination of Indexing of Final Orders by Department of State**

In addition to its supervisory role in the archiving of state records,<sup>24</sup> the Department of State (DOS) is required to administer the coordination of the indexing, management, preservation, and availability of agency final orders that must be indexed or listed in accordance with s. 120.53(1), F.S.<sup>25</sup> DOS has rulemaking authority over the system of indexing that agencies may use<sup>26</sup> and the storage and retrieval systems used to provide access.<sup>27</sup> DOS may approve more than one system.<sup>28</sup> Authorized storage and retrieval systems for agencies include reporters, microfilm, automated systems or any other system considered appropriate by DOS.<sup>29</sup> Also, DOS is required to determine which final orders agencies must index.<sup>30</sup> Agencies must receive approval in writing from DOS regarding various provisions for indexing final orders.<sup>31</sup>

### **Division of Administrative Hearings**

The Division of Administrative Hearings (DOAH) is a state agency consisting of an independent group of administrative law judges (ALJs) that presides over disputes under the APA and other state laws.<sup>32</sup> DOAH is placed administratively under the Department of Management Services (DMS);<sup>33</sup> however, DOAH is not subject to any control, supervision, or direction by DMS. The director of DOAH, who also serves as chief administrative law judge, has effective administrative control over DOAH, its resources and operations.<sup>34</sup>

Since the 2008 amendments to the APA,<sup>35</sup> agencies have been permitted to satisfy the final order index requirement by electronically transmitting a copy of its final orders to DOAH for posting

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<sup>22</sup> Jowanna N. Oates, *Access to Agency Final Orders*, The Florida Bar, Administrative Law Section Newsletter, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (June 2013). For an updated list on accessing agency final orders, see <http://www.fladminlaw.org/pdf/information-about-accessing-agency-final-orders.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Section 119.021(3), F.S.

<sup>24</sup> Section 257.35, F.S., Also, see s. 15.02, F.S.

<sup>25</sup> Section 120.533(1), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 120.533(2), F.S.

<sup>27</sup> Section 120.533(3), F.S.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> Section 120.533(4), F.S. The rules adopted under this section are found in ch. 1B-32, F.A.C.

<sup>31</sup> Section 120.53(1)(c), F.S.

<sup>32</sup> Section 120.65, F.S.

<sup>33</sup> Section 120.65(1), F.S.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> Ch. 2008-104, L.O.F.

on DOAH's website.<sup>36</sup> Many agencies use the DOAH alternative.<sup>37</sup> There does not appear to be any law requiring DOAH to maintain its electronic database that is accessible for searching orders.

### **Department of Revenue Technical Assistance Advisements**

Upon request the Department of Revenue (DOR) issues informal technical assistance regarding certain tax consequences.<sup>38</sup> Currently, these technical assistance advisements are exempted from the requirements of s. 120.53(1), F.S.

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

**Section 1** amends s. 120.53, F.S., to require each state agency to upload copies of agency final orders rendered on or after July 1, 2015, in a text-searchable format to a database maintained by the Division of Administrative Hearings (DOAH).

The DOAH database must allow users to search and retrieve the full texts of agency final orders by:

- The name of the agency that issued the final order.
- The date the final agency order was issued.
- The type of final order.
- Terms present in the text of the final order.

The types of agency final orders that must be uploaded to DOAH's database include the following:

- Each final order resulting from a proceeding under s. 120.57 or s. 120.573.
- Each final order rendered pursuant to s. 120.57(4) which contains a statement of agency policy that may be the basis of future agency decisions or that may otherwise contain a statement of precedential value.
- Each declaratory statement issued by an agency.
- Each final order resulting from a proceeding under s. 120.56 or s. 120.574.

Also, the bill requires each agency to maintain a list of all agency final orders rendered pursuant to s. 120.57(4), F.S., which are not required to be uploaded to DOAH's electronic database.

The bill requires each agency to maintain a subject matter index for final orders rendered before July 1, 2015, and the agency must identify where this index is located on its website.

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<sup>36</sup> Section 120.53(2)(a), F.S., provides, in part that that “[a]n agency may comply with subparagraphs (1)(a)1. and 2. by . . . electronically transmitting to the division a copy of such orders for posting on the division’s website.” Also, see DOAH’s website at <https://www.doah.state.fl.us/FLAIO/>.

<sup>37</sup> The DOAH website lists the following agencies having final orders accessible: Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Corrections, Department of Community Affairs, Department of Economic Opportunity, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of State, Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Florida Housing Finance Corporation, Office of the Governor, Agency for Health Care Administration, and Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

<sup>38</sup> Section 213.22(1), F.S.

Within 90 days after the final order is rendered, each agency must upload the order to DOAH's electronic database. If the final order is rendered pursuant to s. 120.57(4), F.S., the agency must maintain such order on its list as required by this bill.

Additionally, for cases where DOAH has final order authority, DOAH must upload the final order to its electronic database within 90 days of issuance of such order.

The bill authorizes an agency to upload to DOAH's electronic database all final orders rendered before July 1, 2015, that are required to be placed in a subject-matter index.

**Section 2** amends s. 119.021(3), F.S., to make conforming changes regarding the requirement of each state agency to permanently maintain all final orders that are electronically uploaded to DOAH in accordance with the provisions of s. 120.53, F.S.

**Section 3** amends s. 120.533, F.S., to require the Department of State (DOS) to adopt rules regarding the maintenance and availability of agency final orders. This section removes the requirement for DOS to adopt rules governing the indexing, management, and preservation of agency final orders. DOS is authorized to approve more than one maintenance system.

**Section 4** amends s. 213.22, F.S., to make conforming changes regarding the non-applicability of s. 120.53, F.S., requirements to technical assistance advisements issued by the Department of Revenue.

**Section 5** provides an effective date of July 1, 2015.

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

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

#### **V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

The bill may have a slight positive economic impact on the private sector by offering easy internet access to agency orders that may only be accessible in person under current law.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

Minimal. The bill analysis submitted by DOAH notes that this agency can maintain all final orders on its website and host full public access with current resources, personnel and equipment.<sup>39</sup> The requirement for state agencies to electronically submit copies of their final orders to DOAH for inclusion in the electronic database would cause minimal fiscal impact to agencies.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

There is no statutory requirement for DOAH to maintain its electronic database of agency final orders.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 120.53, 119.021(3), 120.533, and 213.22(1).

**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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<sup>39</sup> See DOAH legislative bill analysis dated February 12, 2015. A copy of this analysis is on file with the Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee.