

**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 Banking and Insurance

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BILL: SB 1768

INTRODUCER: Senator Lee

SUBJECT: Public Records/Medical Payments Coverage and Liability Motor Vehicle Insurance Policies/Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles

DATE: March 31, 2017

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Knudson</u>	<u>Knudson</u>	<u>BI</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>GO</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1768 amends s. 324.242, F.S., to revise the public records exemption for information in personal injury protection and property damage liability insurance policies held by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV). The bill applies the public records exemption to medical payments coverage and motor vehicle liability insurance policies, instead of personal injury protection and property damage. The bill does not change what information the exemption holds confidential and exempt. The change is necessary because SB 1766 repeals the Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Law, which requires personal injury coverage, and will create bodily injury liability financial responsibility requirements.

The public records exemption will be subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act in accordance with s. 119.15, F.S., and shall stand repealed on October 2, 2022, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Public Records Law**

The Florida Constitution provides that the public has the right to inspect or copy records made or received in connection with official governmental business.<sup>1</sup> This applies to the official business of any public body, officer or employee of the state, including all three branches of state government, local governmental entities and any person acting on behalf of the government.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

In addition to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes provides that the public may access legislative and executive branch records.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 119, F.S., constitutes the main body of public records laws, and is known as the Public Records Act.<sup>4</sup> The Public Records Act states that:

it is the policy of this state that all state, county and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person. Providing access to public records is a duty of each agency.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Public Records Act, a public record includes virtually any document or recording, regardless of its physical form or how it may be transmitted.<sup>6</sup> The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted public records as being “any material prepared in connection with official agency business which is intended to perpetuate, communicate or formalize knowledge of some type.”<sup>7</sup> A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.<sup>8</sup>

The Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.<sup>9</sup> An exemption must pass by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate.<sup>10</sup> In addition, an exemption must explicitly lay out the public necessity justifying the exemption, and the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.<sup>11</sup> A statutory exemption which does not meet these criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.<sup>12</sup>

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is ‘confidential and exempt’ or ‘exempt.’<sup>13</sup> Records designated as ‘confidential and exempt’ may

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<sup>3</sup> The Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records. *Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So.2d 32 (Fla. 1992). Also see *Times Pub. Co. v. Ake*, 660 So.2d 255 (Fla. 1995). The Legislature’s records are public pursuant to s. 11.0431, F.S. Public records exemptions for the Legislatures are primarily located in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.01(1), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines “public record” 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.”

<sup>7</sup> *Shevin v. Byron, Harless, Schaffer, Reid and Assoc. Inc.*, 379 So.2d 633, 640 (Fla. 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Section 119.10, F.S. Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes, as are the penalties for violating those laws.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>12</sup> *Halifax Hosp. Medical Center v. New-Journal Corp.*, 724 So.2d 567 (Fla. 1999). In *Halifax Hospital*, the Florida Supreme Court found that a public meetings exemption was unconstitutional because the statement of public necessity did not define important terms and did not justify the breadth of the exemption. *Id.* at 570. The Florida Supreme Court also declined to narrow the exemption in order to save it. *Id.* In *Baker County Press, Inc. v. Baker County Medical Services, Inc.*, 870 So.2d 189 (Fla. 1st DCA 2004), the court found that the intent of a statute was to create a public records exemption. The *Baker County Press* court found that since the law did not contain a public necessity statement, it was unconstitutional. *Id.* at 196.

<sup>13</sup> If the Legislature designates a record as confidential, such record may not be released to anyone other than the persons or entities specifically designated in the statutory exemption. *WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

be released by the records custodian only under the circumstances defined by the Legislature. Records designated as ‘exempt’ may be released at the discretion of the records custodian.<sup>14</sup>

### **Open Government Sunset Review Act**

In addition to the constitutional requirements relating to the enactment of a public records exemption, the Legislature may subject the new or broadened exemption to the Open Government Sunset Review Act (OGSR).

The OGSR prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records.<sup>15</sup> The OGSR provides that an exemption automatically repeals on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment; in order to save an exemption from repeal, the Legislature must reenact the exemption.<sup>16</sup> In practice, many exemptions are continued by repealing the sunset date rather than reenacting the exemption.

### **Section 324.242, F.S., Exemption**

Every Florida registrant of a motor vehicle must obtain and provide proof of holding a motor vehicle insurance policy that includes \$10,000 in personal injury protection (PIP).<sup>17</sup> Additionally, s. 324.022, F.S., requires owners and operators of Florida-registered motor vehicles to maintain the ability to pay at least \$10,000 in property damage, which may be met by maintaining \$10,000 in property damage liability coverage.<sup>18</sup> A higher financial requirement is placed on commercial motor vehicles, taxicab owners and operators, for-hire passenger transportation vehicles, and registered vehicle owners or operators found guilty or that have plead nolo contendere to driving under the influence.<sup>19</sup>

The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) is notified by insurers that supply policies with personal injury protection or property damage liability coverage of renewals, cancellations, and non-renewals of these policies within 45 days of their effective dates, as required by s. 324.0221, F.S. The insurer must also notify the named insured in writing of the cancellation or non-renewal of a policy and give notice of the consequences from the failure of maintaining PIP and property damage coverage, including the loss of registration, loss of driving privileges, and imposition of reinstatement fees. The records held by the DHSMV contain the insurance company code, the policy number, driver’s license number, personal identifying information (name and address), and information identifying the vehicle, including the vehicle identification number and the make, model, and year of the vehicle.

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<sup>14</sup> A record classified as exempt from public disclosure may be disclosed under certain circumstances. *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15, F.S. According to s. 119.15(4)(b), F.S., a substantially amended exemption is one that is expanded to include more information or to include meetings. The OGSR does not apply to an exemption that is required by federal law or that applies solely to the Legislature or the State Court System pursuant to s. 119.15(2), F.S. The OGSR process is currently being followed, however, the Legislature is not required to continue to do so. The Florida Supreme Court has found that one legislature cannot bind a future legislature. *Scott v. Williams*, 107 So.3d 379 (Fla. 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 627.733, F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 324.022, F.S.

<sup>19</sup> See ss. 324.023, F.S., and 324.032, F.S.

Section 324.242, F.S., exempts from public records requirements personal identifying information, including the name, address, and driver's license number of insureds and former insureds and the insurance policy number contained in PIP and property damage liability motor vehicle insurance policies.<sup>20</sup> The exemption serves to protect sensitive personal information concerning individuals whose reputation or safety from identity theft would be jeopardized if the information were released. The exemption also protects confidential information used for business advantage against competitors. The disclosure of this information could injure insurance companies in the market since competitors would be able to solicit the business of their policyholders. The information exempted by s. 324.242, F.S., is neither obtainable by alternate means nor protected under other exemptions. However under s. 324.242, F.S., the DHSMV must release the policy number for a vehicle involved in an accident to any person involved in the accident, the attorney of any person involved in the accident, or a representative of the insurer of any person involved in the accident upon receipt of a written request and copy of the crash report.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1** amends s. 324.242, F.S., to revise the public records exemption for information in personal injury protection and property damage liability policies held by the DHSMV. The bill applies the public records exemption to medical payments coverage and motor vehicle liability insurance policies, instead of personal injury protection and property damage. The bill does not change what information the exemption holds confidential and exempt. The change is necessary because SB 1766 will repeal the Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Law which requires personal injury coverage, and will create bodily injury liability financial responsibility requirements.

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**Section 2** justifies the exemption through legislative findings that it is a public necessity to make certain information regarding bodily injury liability insurance and medical payments coverage policy held by the DHSMV confidential and exempt. The section states that it is imperative that automobile drivers be properly insured to ensure public safety on the roads and highways. Consequently, insurers must report to the DHSMV and verify the issuance, renewal, nonrenewal, or cancellation of motor vehicle insurance policies. The information includes the personal identifying information of insureds and former insureds as well as insurance policy numbers. This information, if compiled, could create customer lists for each insurer in the state, which are traditionally considered proprietary business information. Further, public access to such information could be used to perpetuate fraud against an insured, put him or her at risk, or make the insured the target of uninvited solicitations from other insurers and others seeking to profit from motor vehicle accidents.

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<sup>20</sup> The statutory predecessor to s. 324.242, F.S., was s. 627.736(9)(a), F.S., which was repealed as part of the Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Law on October 1, 2007.

**Section 3** makes the act effective on the same date that SB 1766 or similar legislation takes effect, if such legislation is adopted in the same legislative session or an extension thereof and becomes law.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

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 contains the public necessity statement required by Article I, s. 24(c) of the Florida Constitution for a newly-created or expanded public records or public meetings exemption.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

Line 97 should be amended to link the bill to SB 1766.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 324.242 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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