

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 738

INTRODUCER: Senator Perry

SUBJECT: Public Records and Public Meetings/Firesafety System Plans

DATE: February 5, 2018

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Matiyow</u>	<u>Knudson</u>	<u>BI</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Peacock</u>	<u>Caldwell</u>	<u>GO</u>	Favorable
3.	_____	_____	<u>RC</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 738 makes confidential and exempt from public records requirements in s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the Florida Constitution, firesafety system plans for any state owned or leased property and any privately owned or leased property and information relating to such systems that are held by a state agency. The bill also makes confidential and exempt from public meeting requirements any portion of a meeting that would reveal a firesafety system plan that is exempt from public records requirements. The exemption is incorporated into the existing public records and public meeting exemptions for security systems.

The exemptions are necessitated because firesafety systems are often integrated with security systems. It is believed that disclosure of sensitive information relating to the firesafety systems could result in identification of vulnerabilities in the firesafety or security systems and allow a security breach that could damage the systems and disrupt their safe and reliable operation.

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

The bill has an effective date of upon becoming law and provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2023, 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.¹ This applies to the official business

¹ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(a).

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.²

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

[i]t 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.⁵

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.⁶ 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.”⁷ A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.⁸

The Legislature may create an exemption to open meetings requirements by passing a general law by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate.⁹ The exemption must explicitly lay out the public necessity justifying the exemption, and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.¹⁰ A statutory exemption which does not meet these two criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.¹¹

² *Id.*

³ 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 Legislature are primarily located in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S.

⁴ Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

⁵ Section 119.01(1), F.S.

⁶ 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” 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.”

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

⁸ s. 119.10, F.S. Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes, as are the penalties for violating those laws.

⁹ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *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.

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is ‘confidential and exempt’ or ‘exempt.’¹² Records designated as ‘confidential and exempt’ may 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 under certain circumstances.¹³

Open Meetings Laws

The Florida Constitution provides that the public has a right to access governmental meetings.¹⁴ Each collegial body must provide notice of its meetings to the public and permit the public to attend any meeting at which official acts are taken or at which public business is transacted or discussed.¹⁵ This applies to the meetings of any collegial body of the executive branch of state government, counties, municipalities, school districts, or special districts.¹⁶

Public policy regarding access to government meetings also is addressed in the Florida Statutes. Section 286.011, F.S., which is also known as the “Government in the Sunshine Law”¹⁷ or the “Sunshine Law,”¹⁸ requires all meetings of any board or commission of any state or local agency or authority at which official acts are to be taken be open to the public.¹⁹ The board or commission must provide the public reasonable notice of such meetings.²⁰ Public meetings may not be held at any location that discriminates on the basis of sex, age, race, creed, color, origin or economic status or which operates in a manner that unreasonably restricts the public’s access to the facility.²¹ Minutes of a public meeting must be promptly recorded and open to public inspection.²² Failure to abide by open meetings requirements will invalidate any resolution, rule, or formal action adopted at a meeting.²³ A public officer or member of a governmental entity who violates the Sunshine Law is subject to civil and criminal penalties.²⁴

The Legislature may create an exemption to open meetings requirements by passing a general law by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate.²⁵ The exemption must explicitly lay out

¹² 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).

¹³ A record classified as exempt from public disclosure may be disclosed under certain circumstances. *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

¹⁴ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(b).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(b). Meetings of the Legislature are governed by Article III, section 4(e) of the Florida Constitution, which states: “The rules of procedure of each house shall further provide that all prearranged gatherings, between more than two members of the legislature, or between the governor, the president of the senate, or the speaker of the house of representatives, the purpose of which is to agree upon formal legislative action that will be taken at a subsequent time, or at which formal legislative action is taken, regarding pending legislation or amendments, shall be reasonably open to the public.”

¹⁷ *Times Pub. Co. v. Williams*, 222 So. 2d 470, 472 (Fla. 2d DCA 1969).

¹⁸ *Board of Public Instruction of Broward County v. Doran*, 224 So. 2d 693, 695 (Fla. 1969).

¹⁹ Section 286.011(1)-(2), F.S.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Section 286.011(6), F.S.

²² Section 286.011(2), F.S.

²³ Section 286.011(1), F.S.

²⁴ Section 286.011(3), F.S.

²⁵ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

the public necessity justifying the exemption, and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.²⁶ A statutory exemption which does not meet these two criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.²⁷

Open Government Sunset Review Act

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (OGSR) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records.²⁸ 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.²⁹ In practice, many exemptions are continued by repealing the sunset date rather than reenacting the exemption.

The OGSR 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.³⁰ 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 program, and administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;³¹
- Releasing sensitive personal information would be defamatory or would jeopardize an individual's safety. If this public purpose is cited as the basis of an exemption, however, only personal identifying information is exempt;³² or
- It protects trade or business secrets.³³

The OGSR also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.³⁴ In examining an exemption, the OGSR asks the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *See supra* note 11.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

³⁰ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

³¹ Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

³² Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

³³ Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

³⁴ 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?

If the Legislature expands an exemption, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.³⁵ If the exemption is reenacted without substantive changes or if the exemption is narrowed, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are *not* required. If the Legislature allows an exemption to sunset, the previously exempt records will remain exempt unless otherwise provided for by law.³⁶

Exemptions Related to Security Systems

Current law provides public record and public meeting exemptions for certain information related to security systems. The law specifies the circumstances under which the information may be disclosed and to whom it may be disclosed.

Public Records and Public Meeting Exemptions for Security System Plans

Section 119.071(3)(a)1., F.S., defines “security system plan” to include all:

- Records, information, photographs, audio and visual presentations, schematic diagrams, surveys, recommendations, or consultations or portions thereof relating directly to the physical security of the facility or revealing security systems;
- Threat assessments conducted by any agency or any private entity;
- Threat response plans;
- Emergency evacuation plans;
- Sheltering arrangements; or
- Manuals for security personnel, emergency equipment, or security training.

A security system plan or any portion thereof that is held by an agency is confidential and exempt from public record requirements if the plan is for:

- Any property owned by or leased to the state or any of its political subdivisions; or
- Any privately owned or leased property.³⁷

An agency is authorized to disclose the confidential and exempt information:

- To the property owner or leaseholder;
- In furtherance of the official duties and responsibilities of the agency holding the information;
- To another local, state, or federal agency in furtherance of that agency’s official duties and responsibilities; or
- Upon a showing of good cause before a court of competent jurisdiction.³⁸

Section 281.301, F.S., provides that information relating to security systems that is in the possession of an agency is confidential and exempt from public record and public meeting requirements if the security systems are for:

- Any property owned by or leased to the state or any of its political subdivisions; or
- Any privately owned or leased property.

³⁵ FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

³⁶ Section 119.15(7), F.S.

³⁷ Section 119.071(3)(a)2., F.S.

³⁸ Section 119.071(3)(a)3., F.S.

The law specifies that the protected information includes all records, information, photographs, audio and visual presentations, schematic diagrams, surveys, recommendations, or consultations or portions thereof relating directly to or revealing such systems or information.

An agency is authorized to disclose the confidential and exempt information:

- To the property owner or leaseholder;
- In furtherance of the official duties and responsibilities of the agency holding the information;
- To another local, state, or federal agency in furtherance of that agency's official duties and responsibilities; or
- Upon a showing of good cause before a court of competent jurisdiction.

Section 286.0113, F.S., provides any portion of a meeting that would reveal a security system plan or portion thereof is exempt from public meeting requirements.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 119.071(3), F.S., to make confidential and exempt from public records requirements in s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, firesafety system plans for any state owned or leased property or any of its political subdivisions and any privately owned or leased property and information relating to such systems that are held by a state agency.

The bill specifies that the public record exemption must be given retroactive application because it is remedial in nature. Thus, records of firesafety system plans and records relating to firesafety systems in existence prior to the effective date of the bill will be protected by the exemption.

This section is subject to the OGSR in accordance with s. 119.15, F.S., and stands repealed on Oct. 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Section 2 amends s. 281.301, F.S., to make confidential and exempt from public records requirements in s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, firesafety system plans for any state owned or leased property or any of its political subdivisions and any privately owned or leased property and information relating to such systems that are held by a state agency.

The bill also makes confidential and exempt from public meeting requirements in s. 286.011, F.S., and s. 24(b), Art. I of the State Constitution, any portion of a meeting that would reveal a firesafety system plan that is exempt from public records requirements.

Section 3 amends s. 286.0113, F.S., to make confidential and exempt from public meeting requirements in s. 286.011, F.S., and s. 24(b), Art. I of the State Constitution, any portion of a meeting that would reveal a firesafety system plan that is exempt from public records requirements.

This section is subject to the OGSR in accordance with s. 119.15, F.S., and stands repealed on Oct. 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Section 4 provides a public necessity statement as required by the State Constitution, specifying that as firesafety systems become more integrated with security systems, disclosure of sensitive information relating to the firesafety systems could result in identification of vulnerabilities in the systems and allow a security breach that could damage the systems and disrupt their safe and reliable operation.

Section 5 provides that the bill is effective upon becoming law.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

Voting Requirement

Article I, Section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of each chamber for public records exemptions to pass.

Public Necessity Statement

Article I, Section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a public necessity statement for a newly created or expanded public records exemption. The Florida Constitution provides that an exemption must state with specificity the public necessity of the exemption. The public necessity statement provides that the exemption is needed to protect the public health and safety and economic well-being of the state and to prevent disclosure of sensitive information relating to firesafety systems that could result in identification of vulnerabilities in such systems and allow a security breach that could damage firesafety systems and disrupt their safe and reliable operation.

Breadth of Exemption

Article I, Section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a newly created or expanded public records exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The bill exempts firesafety system plans for any state owned or leased property and any privately owned or leased property and information relating to such systems that are held by a state agency. This bill appears to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the public necessity for this public records 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:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 119.071, 281.301, and 286.0113.

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.