

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 Criminal Justice

BILL: SB 862

INTRODUCER: Senator Bracy

SUBJECT: Public Records/Sealing of Criminal History Records

DATE: January 26, 2018

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Storch	Jones	CJ	Pre-meeting
2.			GO	
3.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 862, which is linked to the passage of SB 860, expands an existing public records exemption to include administratively sealed criminal history records.

An administratively sealed record is a criminal history record of a minor arrested or charged with a felony, misdemeanor, or violation of a comparable rule or ordinance by a state, county, municipal, or other law enforcement agency that is sealed upon notification by the clerk of the court that all the charges related to the arrest or incident of alleged criminal activity:

- Were declined to be filed by the state attorney or statewide prosecutor;
- Were dismissed or nolle prosequi before trial; or
- Resulted in a judgment of acquittal or a not guilty verdict.

The expansion of the exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and stands repealed on October 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

The Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature for final passage because it expands an existing public records exemption.

The bill takes effect on the same date that SB 860 or similar legislation takes effect, if such legislation is adopted in the same legislative session or an extension thereof and becomes law.

II. Present Situation:

The Florida Constitution provides that every individual has a right of access to public records which are made or received in connection with official public business unless the records are exempt. This right applies to records of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.¹

The Public Records Act, codified in ch. 119, F.S., expressly guarantees every person's right to inspect and copy any state or local government public record² at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under the supervision of the public records custodian.³

Only the Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.⁴ Such an exemption must be created by general law and 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.

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (OGSR) requires a newly created or expanded public records exemption be repealed on October 2 of the fifth year after enactment, unless reviewed and reenacted by the Legislature.⁵ It further provides that a public records exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and is no broader than is necessary to meet the public purpose it serves.⁶

An exemption serves an identifiable purpose if it meets one of the following purposes 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.
- The release of 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.
- It protects trade or business secrets.⁷

In addition, the Legislature must find that the purpose of the exemption overrides Florida's public policy strongly favoring open government.

¹ Article I, s. 24(a), FLA. CONST.

² Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines "public record" as 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.

³ Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

⁴ Article I, s. 24(c), FLA CONST. 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 Bd. 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 1994); and *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991). If the Legislature designates a record as confidential and exempt from public disclosure, then 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 Op. Att'y Gen, Fla. 85-62, August 1, 1985.

⁵ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

⁶ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

⁷ Section 119.15(6)(b)1.-3., F.S.

The OGSR also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.⁸ In examining an exemption, the OGSR asks the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of the exemption. These 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?⁹

To enact an exemption, the bill may not contain other substantive provisions¹⁰ and must pass by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature.¹¹

Court-ordered Sealing of Criminal History Records

Florida law makes adult criminal history records accessible to the public unless the record has been sealed or expunged.¹² Section 943.059, F.S., provides the procedure for sealing a criminal history record, which places a record under highly restricted access pursuant to court order.¹³

A person seeking to have his or her criminal history record sealed must obtain a certificate of eligibility for sealing pursuant to requirements set forth in s. 943.059(2), F.S., and subsequently petition the court to seal the record.¹⁴

A criminal history record of a minor or an adult which is ordered sealed by a court pursuant to s. 943.059, F.S., is confidential and exempt from the provisions of s. 119.07(1), F.S., and Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution.¹⁵ Such record is available only to:

- The person who is the subject of the record;
- The subject's attorney;
- Criminal justice agencies for their respective criminal justice purposes;
- Judges in the state courts system for the purpose of assisting them in their case-related decisionmaking responsibilities; and
- Entities set forth in s. 943.059(4)(a), F.S.¹⁶

⁸ Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S.

⁹ Section 119.15(6)(a)1.-6., F.S.

¹⁰ The bill may, however, contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

¹¹ Article I, s. 24(c), FLA. CONST.

¹² Florida Department of Law Enforcement, *Seal and Expunge Process*, available at <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/cms/Seal-and-Expunge-Process/Seal-and-Expunge-Home.aspx> (last visited January 22, 2018). See s. 943.053, F.S.

¹³ "Sealing of a criminal history record" is the preservation of a record under such circumstances that it is secure and inaccessible to any person not having a legal right of access to the record or the information contained and preserved therein. Section 943.045(19), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 943.059, F.S.

¹⁵ Section 943.059(4), F.S.

¹⁶ Section 943.059(4), F.S.

The person who has their criminal history record sealed may lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge the records that were sealed, unless they are:

- A defendant in a criminal prosecution;
- Seeking appointment as a guardian, a position with a criminal justice agency, a license by the Division of Insurance Agent and Agency Services within the Department of Financial Services, or a position with an agency that is responsible for the protection of vulnerable persons, including children, the disabled, or the elderly;
- Petitioning to have a court-ordered criminal history record expunged or sealed or petitioning for relief under s. 943.0583, F.S.;
- A candidate for admission to The Florida Bar;
- Attempting to purchase a firearm from a licensed imported, licensed manufacturer, or licensed dealer and is subject to a criminal history check under state or federal law; or
- Seeking to be licensed by the Bureau of License Issuance of the Division of Licensing within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to carry a concealed weapon or concealed firearm.¹⁷

The FDLE must disclose the sealed criminal history record to the entities listed above for their respective licensing, access authorization, and employment purposes. An employee of an entity listed above may only disclose information relating to the existence of a sealed criminal history record to the person to whom the criminal history record relates or to persons having direct responsibility for employment, access authorization, or licensure decisions.¹⁸

If a person has his or her criminal record sealed, he or she may not be held under any provision of law of this state to commit perjury or otherwise be liable for giving a false statement for failure to acknowledge a sealed criminal history record.¹⁹

Administrative Sealing

SB 860, which is linked to SB 862, creates a process for the administrative sealing of certain criminal history records of a minor.

A criminal history record of a minor arrested or charged with a felony, misdemeanor, or violation of a comparable rule or ordinance by a state, county, municipal, or other law enforcement agency is administratively sealed upon notification by the clerk of the court that all the charges related to the arrest or incident of alleged criminal activity:

- Were declined to be filed by the state attorney or statewide prosecutor;
- Were dismissed or nolle prosequi before trial; or
- Resulted in a judgment of acquittal or a not guilty verdict.

Additionally, all appeals must have been exhausted by the prosecution or the time to file an appeal must have expired in order for a record to be administratively sealed.

¹⁷ Section 943.059(4)(a), F.S.

¹⁸ Section 943.059(4)(c), F.S.

¹⁹ This is subject to the exceptions enumerated in s. 943.059(4)(a), F.S., whereby a person must acknowledge a sealed criminal history record under certain circumstances. *See* s. 943.059(4)(b), F.S.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill expands the public records exemption for sealed records in s. 943.059, F.S., to include records administratively sealed pursuant to s. 943.0586, F.S.

An administratively sealed criminal history record would be treated the same as a record sealed pursuant to s. 943.059, F.S., making such record confidential and exempt and only available to certain people. Additionally, the person who is the subject of the criminal history record that is administratively sealed would be permitted to lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge the existence of the record, with limited exceptions.²⁰

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the Florida Constitution.²¹ The statement includes the following findings:

- The presence of a criminal history record in a minor's past which has not been validated through criminal proceedings can jeopardize his or her ability to obtain education, employment, and other opportunities necessary to become a productive, contributing, self-sustaining member of society; and
- Such negative consequences are unwarranted in cases in which a minor was not found to have committed the offense that is the subject of the sealed criminal history record.

The bill repeals the expansion of the exemption on October 2, 2023, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature.

The bill provides that s. 943.059, F.S., shall revert to that in existence on June 30, 2018, if the expansion of the exemption is not saved from repeal. The bill provides that any amendments made to s. 943.059, F.S., shall be preserved and continue to operate to the extent that such amendments are not dependent upon the portions of text which are not saved from repeal.

The bill takes effect on the same date that SB 860 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:

This bill expands a public records exemption. Therefore, the following constitutional requirements apply.

²⁰ See s. 943.059(4), F.S.

²¹ Article I, s. 24(c), FLA. CONST.

Substance of the Bill

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires that laws enacted to exempt records from public inspection must contain only exemptions and relate to one subject. This bill expands a public records exemption related to sealed criminal history records.

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 public record or public meeting exemption. The bill expands a public records exemption; 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 a public records exemption and includes a public necessity statement for the expansion.

Breadth of Exemption

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a public records exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. Based on the legislative findings in the statement of public necessity, this expansion of a public records exemption appears to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

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

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill may have a minimal fiscal impact on agencies responsible for complying with public records requests and redacting confidential and exempt information prior to releasing a record. However, these costs should be able to be absorbed with existing resources.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

SB 860 is the related administrative sealing bill linked to this bill.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 943.059 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.