

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS  
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

**BILL #:** HB 7017 PCB OTM 19-08 Pub. Rec./Photographs or Video or Audio Recordings that Depict or Record the Killing of a Victim of Mass Violence  
**SPONSOR(S):** Oversight, Transparency & Public Management Subcommittee; Grant, J.; Brown  
**TIED BILLS:** IDEN./SIM. **BILLS:** SB 186, HB 577

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
Orig. Comm.: Oversight, Transparency & Public Management Subcommittee	13 Y, 0 N	Moore	Harrington
1) Criminal Justice Subcommittee	10 Y, 3 N	Deatherage	Hall
2) State Affairs Committee	21 Y, 0 N	Moore	Williamson
<b>FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:</b> 108 Y's 6 N's			
<b>GOVERNOR'S ACTION:</b> Approved			

**SUMMARY ANALYSIS**

HB 7017 passed the House on May 1, 2019, as SB 186 as amended. The Senate concurred in the House amendment to the Senate Bill and subsequently passed the bill as amended on May 2, 2019.

In 2011, the Legislature created a public record exemption for photographs and video and audio recordings held by an agency that depict or record the killing of a person. In 2016, the Legislature narrowed the exemption so that it applies only to photographs and video and audio recordings that depict or record the killing of a law enforcement officer who was acting in accordance with his or her official duties. These photographs and video and audio recordings are confidential and exempt from public record requirements, except that the exemption permits a surviving spouse to view, listen to, and copy these records. If there is no surviving spouse, the surviving parents may access the records, and if there are no surviving parents, an adult child of the deceased may access the records. Access to the confidential and exempt records is also permitted for a local governmental entity or a state or federal agency in furtherance of its official duties and to others who obtain a court order granting access. Any person who violates the requirements of the public record exemption commits a felony of the third degree.

This bill expands the exemption so that it applies to photographs and video and audio recordings that depict or record the killing of a victim of mass violence. The bill defines the term “killing of a victim of mass violence” to mean events that depict either a victim being killed or the body of a victim killed in an incident in which three or more people, not including the perpetrator, are killed by the perpetrator of an intentional act of violence.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2024, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature. The bill provides a public necessity statement as required by the State Constitution.

The bill may have a minimal fiscal impact on the state and local governments. See Fiscal Comments.

The bill was approved by the Governor on May 23, 2019, ch. 2019-46, L.O.F., and became effective on that date.

## I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

### A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

#### Background

##### Public Records

Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records. This section guarantees every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The Legislature, however, may provide by general law for the exemption of records from the requirements of Article I, section 24(a).<sup>1</sup> The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption<sup>2</sup> and must be no more broad than necessary to accomplish its purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Public policy regarding access to government records is addressed further in the Florida Statutes. Section 119.07(1), F.S., guarantees every person a right to inspect and copy any state, county, or municipal record. Furthermore, the Open Government Sunset Review Act<sup>4</sup> provides that a public record or public meeting exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose. In addition, it may be no broader than is necessary to meet one of the following purposes:

- Allow the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption.
- Protect sensitive personal information that, if released, would be defamatory or would jeopardize an individual's safety; however, only the identity of an individual may be exempted under this provision.
- Protect trade or business secrets.<sup>5</sup>

The Open Government Sunset Review Act requires the automatic repeal of a newly created exemption on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.<sup>6</sup>

##### Exemption for Photographs and Recordings Depicting the Killing of a Person

In 2011, the Legislature created a public record exemption for photographs and video and audio recordings held by an agency<sup>7</sup> that depict or record the killing of a person.<sup>8</sup> Pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, the exemption was scheduled to repeal on October 2, 2016, unless reenacted by the Legislature.<sup>9</sup> During the 2015 interim, staff of the House of Representatives and Senate conducted a review of the exemption and jointly sent a survey regarding interpretation and implementation of the public record exemption to state agencies, state universities and colleges, counties, municipalities, and local law enforcement agencies that received or maintained the records

---

<sup>1</sup> Art. I, s. 24(c), Fla. Const.

<sup>2</sup> This portion of a public record exemption is commonly referred to as a "public necessity statement."

<sup>3</sup> Art. I, s. 24(c), Fla. Const.

<sup>4</sup> Section 119.15, F.S.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 119.011(2), F.S., defines the term "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>8</sup> Section 1, ch. 2011-115, L.O.F. "Killing of a person" was defined to mean "all acts or events that cause or otherwise relate to the death of any human being, including any related acts or events immediately preceding or subsequent to the acts or events that were the proximate cause of death."

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

protected by the exemption. Most of the entities that responded recommended reenacting the exemption.<sup>10</sup>

During the 2016 Session, the Legislature narrowed the exemption so that it applies only to photographs and video and audio recordings that depict the killing of a law enforcement officer who was acting in accordance with his or her official duties.<sup>11</sup> These photographs and video and audio recordings are confidential and exempt<sup>12</sup> from public record requirements, except that the exemption permits a surviving spouse to view, listen to, and copy these records.<sup>13</sup> If there is no surviving spouse, the deceased's surviving parents may access the confidential and exempt records, and if there are no surviving parents, an adult child of the deceased may access the records.<sup>14</sup> The surviving relative who has the authority to access these records may designate in writing an agent to obtain them.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, a local governmental entity or a state or federal agency, upon written request, may view, listen to, or copy the confidential and exempt photographs and video and audio recordings in furtherance of its official duties. Unless otherwise required in the performance of the entity's or agency's duties, the identity of the deceased must remain confidential and exempt.<sup>16</sup>

Persons other than those covered by these exceptions may only have access to the confidential and exempt photographs and recordings if they obtain a court order. Upon a showing of good cause, a court may issue an order authorizing any person to view, listen to, or copy a confidential and exempt photograph or video or audio recording. The court is authorized to prescribe any restrictions or stipulations that the court deems appropriate. In determining good cause, the court must consider:

- Whether such disclosure is necessary for the public evaluation of governmental performance;
- The seriousness of the intrusion into the family's right to privacy and whether such disclosure is the least intrusive means available; and
- The availability of similar information in other public records, regardless of form.<sup>17</sup>

If a petition is filed with the court to view, listen to, or copy the confidential and exempt photographs or recordings, a surviving spouse must be given reasonable notice that the petition has been filed, a copy of the petition, and reasonable notice of the opportunity to be present and heard at any hearing on the matter.<sup>18</sup> If there is no surviving spouse, notice must be given to the parents of the deceased and, if the deceased has no living parent, then to the adult children of the deceased. If the court grants access to

---

<sup>10</sup> House of Representatives Final Bill Analysis for Senate Bill 7022 (2016), p. 4 (Apr. 13, 2016), *available at* <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loadoc.aspx?FileName=s7022z1.SAC.DOCX&DocumentType=Analysis&BillNumber=7022&Session=2016>.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 2016-214, L.O.F. The term "killing of a law enforcement officer who was acting in accordance with his or her official duties" is defined to mean all acts or events that cause or otherwise relate to the death of a law enforcement officer who was acting in accordance with his or her official duties, including any related acts or events immediately preceding or subsequent to the acts or events that were the proximate cause of death. Section 406.136(1), F.S.

<sup>12</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. 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); *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 statute. *See* Attorney General Opinion 85-62 (August 1, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Section 406.136(2), F.S.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Section 406.136(3)(a), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 406.136(3)(b), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 406.136(4), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 406.136(5), F.S.

the confidential and exempt record, the access must be provided under the direct supervision of the custodian of the record or his or her designee.<sup>19</sup>

It is a third degree felony for any custodian of a photograph or video or audio recording to willfully and knowingly violate these provisions.<sup>20</sup> The same penalty applies to anyone who willfully and knowingly violates a court order issued under these provisions.<sup>21</sup>

The exemption does not apply to photographs or video or audio recordings submitted as part of a criminal or administrative proceeding; however, nothing prohibits a court in such proceedings from restricting the disclosure of a killing, crime scene, or similar photograph or video or audio recording.<sup>22</sup>

The exemption is retroactive, except that it is not intended to overturn, abrogate, or alter any court order in effect on July 1, 2011, that restricts or limits access to any such photograph or recording.<sup>23</sup>

### **Effect of Proposed Changes**

The bill expands the public record exemption for photographs and video and audio recordings that depict or record the killing of a law enforcement officer who was acting in accordance with his or her official duties to also apply the exemption to such records that depict or record the killing of a victim of mass violence. The bill defines the term “killing of a victim of mass violence” to mean events that depict either a victim being killed or the body of a victim killed in an incident in which three or more people, not including the perpetrator, are killed by the perpetrator of an intentional act of violence.

The bill specifies that the exemption is retroactive, except that it is not intended to overturn, abrogate, or alter any existing court order that restricts or limits access to any such photograph or recording. The bill also specifies that the public record exemption does not preclude a surviving spouse, parent, or adult child of a victim from sharing or publicly releasing an exempt photograph or video or audio recording.

The bill provides a public necessity statement as required by the State Constitution, specifying that the photographs and video and audio recordings are highly sensitive representations of the deceased that, if heard, viewed, copied, or publicized, could result in trauma, sorrow, humiliation, or emotional injury to the immediate family of the deceased and detract from the memory of the deceased. The public necessity statement also states a concern that dissemination of such photographs and video and audio recordings may allow them to be used by terrorists for furtherance of their causes and inspiration to kill, and may educe violent acts by those who have a mental illness or who are morally corrupt.

The bill provides for repeal of the exemption on October 2, 2024, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

The bill transfers the public record exemption from s. 406.136, F.S., to s. 119.071(2)(p), F.S.

---

<sup>19</sup> Section 406.136(4)(c), F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Section 406.136(6)(a), F.S. A third degree felony is punishable by up to five years imprisonment and a fine up to \$5,000. Sections 775.082(3)(d) and 775.083(1)(c), F.S.

<sup>21</sup> Section 406.136(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>22</sup> Section 406.136(c), F.S. In *State v. Schenecker*, No. 11-CF-001376A (Fla. 13th Cir. Ct. August 3, 2011), *cert. denied sub nom.*, *Media General Operations v. State*, 71 So. 3d 124 (Fla. 2d DCA 2011), the circuit court applied the exemption to crime scene photographs of homicide victims.

<sup>23</sup> Section 406.136(7), F.S.

## II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

### A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

#### 1. Revenues:

None.

#### 2. Expenditures:

None.

### B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

#### 1. Revenues:

None.

#### 2. Expenditures:

None.

### C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

### D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.