

**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 7054

INTRODUCER: Banking and Insurance Committee

SUBJECT: OGSR/Hurricane or Flood Loss Models

DATE: March 11, 2019

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	<u>Matiyow</u>	<u>Knudson</u>		<b>BI Submitted as Committee Bill</b>
1.	<u>Ponder</u>	<u>McVaney</u>	<u>GO</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	_____	_____	<u>RC</u>	_____

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## I. Summary:

SB 7054 amends s. 627.0628(3)(g), F.S., to save from repeal the current exemption from public records disclosure for trade secrets used in designing and constructing hurricane and flood loss models that are provided by a private company to the Florida Commission on Hurricane Loss Projection Methodology (methodology commission), the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR), or the consumer advocate under s. 627.0628, F.S., by removing the October 2, 2019, repeal date.

The bill also saves from repeal the public meetings exemption for those portions of a meeting by the methodology commission or a rate filing by an insurer in which trade secrets pertaining to hurricane or flood models are discussed.

Pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, the public records exemption is scheduled to repeal October 2, 2019, unless reenacted by the Legislature. Since the bill continues the exemption and does not expand the scope of the public records exemption, the bill requires a majority vote of each chamber for passage.

This bill takes effect October 1, 2019.

## 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> *Id.*

Chapter 119, F.S., known as the Public Records Act, constitutes the main body of public records laws.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

The Public Records Act typically contains general exemptions that apply across agencies. Agency- or program-specific exemptions often are placed in the substantive statutes relating to that particular agency or program.

The Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records.<sup>5</sup> Legislative records are public pursuant to s. 11.0431, F.S. Public records exemptions for the Legislature are codified primarily in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S., and adopted in the rules of each house of the legislature.

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>

The Florida Statutes specify conditions under which public access to governmental records must be provided. The Public Records Act guarantees every person’s right to inspect and copy any state or local government public record at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record.<sup>8</sup> A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.<sup>9</sup>

Only the Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.<sup>10</sup> An exemption must be created by general law and must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption.<sup>11</sup> Further, the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. A bill enacting an exemption may not contain other substantive provisions<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

<sup>4</sup> Section 119.01(1), F.S.

<sup>5</sup> *Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So. 2d 32 (Fla. 1992). Also see *Times Pub. Co. v. Ake*, 660 So. 2d 255 (Fla. 1995).

<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” 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 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>9</sup> Section 119.10, F.S. Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes, as are the penalties for violating those laws.

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

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> The bill may, however, contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

and must pass by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature.<sup>13</sup>

When creating or expanding a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is ‘confidential and exempt’ or ‘exempt.’<sup>14</sup> Records designated as ‘confidential and exempt’ may be released by the records custodian only under the circumstances defined by the Legislature or pursuant to a court order. Records designated as ‘exempt’ may be released at the discretion of the records custodian under certain circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

### Open Meetings Laws

The Florida Constitution also provides that the public has a right to access governmental meetings.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> This applies to the meetings of any collegial body of the executive branch of state government, counties, municipalities, school districts or special districts.<sup>18</sup>

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,”<sup>19</sup> or the “Sunshine Law,”<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> The board or commission must provide the public reasonable notice of such meetings.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> Minutes of a public meeting must be promptly recorded and open to public inspection.<sup>24</sup> Failure to abide by open meetings requirements will invalidate any resolution, rule or formal action adopted at a meeting.<sup>25</sup> A public officer or member of a governmental entity who violates the Sunshine Law is subject to civil and criminal penalties.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>13</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c)

<sup>14</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 Sch. Bd. of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

<sup>16</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(b).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> 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.”

<sup>19</sup> *Times Pub. Co. v. Williams*, 222 So.2d 470, 472 (Fla. 2d DCA 1969).

<sup>20</sup> *Board of Public Instruction of Broward County v. Doran*, 224 So.2d 693, 695 (Fla. 1969).

<sup>21</sup> Section 286.011(1)-(2), F.S.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> Section 286.011(6), F.S.

<sup>24</sup> Section 286.011(2), F.S.

<sup>25</sup> Section 286.011(1), F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 286.011(3), F.S.

The Legislature may create an exemption to open meetings requirements by passing a general law by at least a two-thirds vote of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> A statutory exemption which does not meet these two criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.<sup>29</sup>

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

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (the Act) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings exemptions,<sup>30</sup> with specified exceptions.<sup>31</sup> The Act 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 or repeal the sunset date.<sup>32</sup> In practice, many exemptions are continued by repealing the sunset date rather than reenacting the exemption.

The Act 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.<sup>33</sup> 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;<sup>34</sup>
- 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;<sup>35</sup> or
- It protects trade or business secrets.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

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

<sup>29</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 public records 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>30</sup> Section 119.15, F.S. An exemption is substantially amended if the amendment expands the scope of the exemption to include more records or information or to include meetings as well as records (s. 119.15(4)(b), F.S.). The requirements of the Act do not apply to an exemption that is required by federal law or that applies solely to the Legislature or the State Court System (s. 119.15(2), F.S.).

<sup>31</sup> Section 119.15(2)(a) and (b), F.S., provide that exemptions that are required by federal law or are applicable solely to the Legislature or the State Court System are not subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act.

<sup>32</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>33</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>34</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

<sup>35</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>36</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

The Act also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.<sup>37</sup> In examining an exemption, the Act asks the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption.

If, in reenacting an exemption or repealing the sunset date, the exemption is expanded, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.<sup>38</sup> If the exemption is reenacted or saved from repeal 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 provided for by law.<sup>39</sup>

### **Florida Commission on Hurricane Loss Projection Methodology**

In 1995, the Florida Legislature created the Florida Commission on Hurricane Loss Projection Methodology (methodology commission), under s. 627.0628, F.S., which declares the legislative intent is “to encourage the use of the most sophisticated actuarial methods to assure that consumers are charged lawful rates for residential property insurance coverage.”<sup>40</sup> The methodology commission is administratively housed within the State Board of Administration, but independently exercises its powers and duties as specified in the statute.

A number of vendors produce highly complex computer models that purport to reflect an average annual expected loss from hurricanes, floods and other perils. Models of this nature are driven by an array of internal assumptions, within a variety of scientific disciplines (e.g., meteorology, structural engineering, actuarial science, statistics, computer science). Although some basic assumptions may be common to more than one model, many of the detailed internal assumptions have been developed only after considerable research by each vendor, which closely guards that information as a trade secret. If all internal information of a model were published, that model could be replicated, and the vendor that produced the model would lose the entirety of its value.

Initially, s. 627.0628, F.S., did not contain an exemption from public records or public meetings. Accordingly, the methodology commission undertook a process to evaluate the participating computer models, which contained proprietary information, without the ability to exempt either records or meetings from full public disclosure. The methodology commission first established detailed standards that a model was required to meet in order to obtain approval. For the portion of the model that was nonproprietary, the methodology commission members questioned the vendor in open meetings; for the portion that was proprietary, the methodology commission hired a “professional team” of experts which went on-site to determine whether the model met

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<sup>37</sup> 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?

<sup>38</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>39</sup> Section 119.15(7), F.S.

<sup>40</sup> Ch. 95-276, s. 6, Laws of Fla.

the applicable standards, and reported its findings to the methodology commission in an open hearing.

In 2005, the Legislature enacted s. 627.0628(3)(f), which pertains to public records exemptions for the methodology commission.<sup>41</sup> The public records exemptions are:

- Section 627.0628(3)(f)1., F.S., which provides that trade secrets used in designing and constructing a hurricane loss model and submitted by a private company to the methodology commission, the OIR, or the consumer advocate are confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution.
- Section 627.0628(3)(f)2., F.S., which provides that a portion of a meeting of the methodology commission or of a rate proceeding at which trade secrets used in designing and constructing a hurricane loss model are discussed is exempt from s. 286.011, F.S., and s. 24(b), Art. I of the State Constitution.

In 2014<sup>42</sup>, the Legislature expanded the methodology commission's oversight to include flood models submitted by insurers wanting to offer private flood insurance in competition with the National Flood Insurance Program. The Legislature that year also expanded the current public records exemptions for hurricane models to include flood models submitted to the methodology commission, the OIR and the office of the consumer advocate.<sup>43</sup> As a result of amending the current exemptions to include flood models, all exempt materials will sunset of October 2, 2019, unless saved from repeal by the Legislature.

Staff reviewed the methodology commission responses<sup>44</sup> to the questions to be considered in accordance with s. 119.15(6)(a), F.S. The commission stated that the exemption prevents the disclosure of trade secrets that would negatively impact the business interests of companies that develop hurricane and flood models. The commission stated that such trade secrets are not readily obtainable through alternative means and are not protected by another exemption.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1** amends s. 627.0628, F.S., to continue the public records exemption for the scheduled repeal trade secrets used in designing and constructing hurricane and flood loss models that are provided to the methodology commission, the OIR, or the consumer advocate under s. 627.0628, F.S.

The bill also continues the public meeting exemption for that portion of a meeting of the methodology commission or a rate filing by an insurer in which trade secrets pertaining to hurricane and flood loss models are discussed.

**Section 2** provides that the bill takes effect October 1, 2019.

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<sup>41</sup> Ch. 2005-264, s. 3, Laws of Fla.

<sup>42</sup> Ch. 2014-80, Laws of Fla.

<sup>43</sup> Ch. 2014-98, Laws of Fla.

<sup>44</sup> Email from Leonard Schulte, Commission Representative, to Scott Matiyow, Senior Legislative Analyst for the Senate Committee on Banking and Insurance (September 25, 2018) (on file with the Senate Committee on Banking and Insurance).

**IV. Constitutional Issues:****A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

Not applicable. The bill does not require counties or municipalities to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds, reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenue in the aggregate nor reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

**B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:*****Vote Requirement***

Article 1, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for final passage of a bill creating or expanding an exemption to the public records requirements. This bill continues a current public records exemption and public meeting exemption beyond its current date of repeal; thus, the bill does not require an extraordinary vote for enactment.

***Public Necessity Statement***

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a bill creating or expanding an exemption to the public records requirements to state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption. This bill continues current public records and public meetings exemptions without expansion. Thus, a statement of public necessity is not required.

***Breadth of Exemption***

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires an exemption to the public records requirements to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The purpose of the law is to protect trade secrets used in designing and constructing hurricane and flood loss models that are provided by a private company to the methodology commission, the OIR, or the consumer advocate under s. 627.0628, F.S. Additionally, the law protects that portion of a meeting with the methodology commission or of a rate proceeding on an insurer's rate filing in which trade secrets pertaining to hurricane and flood loss models are discussed. The exemptions do not appear to be broader than necessary to accomplish the purpose of the law.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**D. State Tax or Fee Increases:**

None.

**E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None identified.

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

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

Private vendors that produce hurricane and flood loss models to the methodology commission would continue to have their sensitive development data and information protected. The private sector will continue to be subject to the cost associated with the agency making redactions in response to public records request.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The exemptions will continue to allow members of the methodology commission, the OIR, and the consumer advocate's office to have access to all information pertaining to the development of models that project hurricane and flood losses. The agency will continue to incur costs related to the redaction of records in response to public records request.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 627.0628 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.