

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 7034

INTRODUCER: Criminal Justice Committee

SUBJECT: OGSR/Residential Facilities Serving Victims of Sexual Exploitation

DATE: January 24, 2020

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	Cox	Jones		CJ Submitted as Committee Bill
1.	Hackett	McVaney	GO	Favorable
2.			RC	

I. Summary:

SB 7034 amends ss. 409.1678 and 787.06, F.S., to save from repeal the public record exemptions relating to location information of safe houses, safe foster homes, other residential facilities serving child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity, respectively.

Safe houses and safe foster homes are certified by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to care for sexually exploited children. Safe houses and safe foster homes must provide a safe, separate, and therapeutic environment tailored to the needs of specified commercially sexually exploited children who have endured significant trauma.

Current law makes confidential and exempt from public disclosure information about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, other residential facilities serving child victims of sexual exploitation, and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity. However, the information may be provided to any agency in order to maintain health and safety standards and to address emergency situations.

The Open Government Sunset Review Act requires the Legislature to review each public record and each public meeting exemption five years after enactment. The exemptions contained in ss. 409.1678 and 787.06, F.S., are scheduled to repeal on October 2, 2020. This bill removes these scheduled repeals to continue the confidential and exempt status of the information.

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state or local governments. Costs incurred by an agency in responding to public records requests regarding these exemptions should be offset by authorized fees. See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on October 1, 2020.

II. Present Situation:

Access to Public Records - Generally

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 The right to inspect or copy 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.²

Additional requirements and exemptions related to public records are found in various statutes and rules, depending on the branch of government involved. For instance, s. 11.0431, F.S., provides public access requirements for legislative records. Relevant exemptions are codified in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S., and the statutory provisions are adopted in the rules of each house of the legislature.³ Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.420 governs public access to judicial branch records.⁴ Lastly, ch. 119, F.S., provides requirements for public records held by executive agencies.

Executive Agency Records – The Public Records Act

Chapter 119, F.S., known as the Public Records Act, provides that all state, county, and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person, and that providing access to public records is a duty of each agency.⁵

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 the statutory definition of “public record” to include “material prepared in connection with official agency business which is intended to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge of some type.”⁷

The Florida Statutes specify conditions under which public access to public records must be provided. The Public Records Act guarantees every person’s right to inspect and copy any public record at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the

¹ FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(a).

² *Id.*

³ See Rule 1.48, *Rules and Manual of the Florida Senate*, (2018-2020) and Rule 14.1, *Rules of the Florida House of Representatives*, Edition 2, (2018-2020).

⁴ *State v. Wooten*, 260 So. 3d 1060 (Fla. 4th DCA 2018).

⁵ Section 119.01(1), F.S. 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.”

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.”

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

custodian of the public record.⁸ A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.⁹

The Legislature may exempt public records from public access requirements by passing a general law by a two-thirds vote of both the House and the Senate.¹⁰ The exemption must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.¹¹

General exemptions from the public records requirements are contained in the Public Records Act.¹² Specific exemptions often are placed in the substantive statutes relating to a particular agency or program.¹³

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is “exempt” or “confidential and exempt.” Custodians of records designated as “exempt” are not prohibited from disclosing the record; rather, the exemption means that the custodian cannot be compelled to disclose the record.¹⁴ Custodians of records designated as “confidential and exempt” may not disclose the record except under circumstances specifically defined by the Legislature.¹⁵

Open Government Sunset Review Act

The Open Government Sunset Review Act¹⁶ (the Act) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended¹⁷ public records or open meetings exemptions, with specified exceptions.¹⁸ It requires the automatic repeal of such exemption on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.¹⁹

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.²⁰

⁸ Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

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

¹⁰ FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

¹¹ *Id. See, e.g., Halifax Hosp. Medical Center v. News-Journal Corp.*, 724 So. 2d 567 (Fla. 1999) (holding 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); *Baker County Press, Inc. v. Baker County Medical Services, Inc.*, 870 So. 2d 189 (Fla. 1st DCA 2004) (holding that a statutory provision written to bring another party within an existing public records exemption is unconstitutional without a public necessity statement).

¹² *See, e.g., s. 119.071(1)(a), F.S.* (exempting from public disclosure examination questions and answer sheets of examinations administered by a governmental agency for the purpose of licensure).

¹³ *See, e.g., s. 213.053(2)(a), F.S.* (exempting from public disclosure information contained in tax returns received by the Department of Revenue).

¹⁴ *See Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So. 2d 683, 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

¹⁵ *WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So. 2d 48 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

¹⁶ Section 119.15, F.S.

¹⁷ An exemption is considered to be substantially amended if it is expanded to include more records or information or to include meetings as well as records. Section 119.15(4)(b), F.S.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

²⁰ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

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 subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, and administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;²¹
- It protects sensitive, personal information, the release of which would be defamatory, cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of the individual, or would jeopardize the individual's safety. If this public purpose is cited as the basis of an exemption, however, only personal identifying information is exempt;²² or
- It protects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, such as trade or business secrets.²³

The Act also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.²⁴ In examining an exemption, the Act directs the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption.

If the exemption is continued and expanded, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.²⁵ If the exemption is continued without substantive changes or if the exemption is continued and 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.²⁶

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery, which involves the exploitation of persons for commercial sex or forced labor.²⁷ An estimated 40.6 million persons were the victims of human trafficking in 2016, with one in four victims being children.²⁸ Human traffickers use various techniques to instill fear in victims, including violence, threats, deception, or keeping

²¹ Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

²² Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

²³ Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

²⁴ 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?

²⁵ See generally s. 119.15, F.S.

²⁶ Section 119.15(7), F.S.

²⁷ Section 787.06(1)(a), F.S. Further, s. 787.06(2)(d), F.S., defines the term "human trafficking" to mean the transporting, soliciting, recruiting, harboring, providing, enticing, maintaining, or obtaining another person for the purpose of exploitation of that person.

²⁸ International Labour Organization, *Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking*, available at <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm> (last visited December 17, 2019).

victims under lock and key.²⁹ Other practices frequently used include isolating victims from the public and family members; confiscating passports, visas, or other identification documents; using or threatening to use violence toward victims or their families; telling victims that they will be imprisoned or deported for immigration violations if they contact authorities; and controlling the victims' funds by holding the money.³⁰ It is estimated that human trafficking generates \$150 billion dollars in illegal profits a year.³¹

Residential Treatment for Certain Victims of Human Trafficking

Safe Houses

A "safe house" is a group residential placement certified by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to care for sexually exploited children.³² Safe houses must provide safe, separate, and therapeutic environments tailored to the needs of commercially sexually exploited children who have endured significant trauma and are not eligible for relief and benefits under the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act.³³ Safe houses must:

- Use strength-based and trauma informed approaches to care;
- Serve exclusively one sex;
- Group child victims by age or maturity level;
- Care for child victims in a manner that separates them from children with other needs;
- Have staff members who are awake and on duty 24 hours a day; and
- Provide appropriate security for the facility through specified means.³⁴

Additionally, safe houses serving children who have been sexually exploited must conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs of each resident and provide a variety of services to meet such needs, including, in part:

- Victim-witness and family counseling;
- Behavioral health care;
- Treatment and intervention for sexual assault;
- Life skills and workforce training;
- Mentoring by a survivor of commercial sexual exploitation if available; and
- Substance abuse screening.³⁵

Safe houses are inspected by DCF prior to certification and annually thereafter.³⁶

²⁹ The Polaris Project, *The Facts*, available at <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/facts> (last visited December 17, 2019).

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ International Labour Organization, *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour*, available at http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang--en/index.htm (last visited December 17, 2019).

³² Section 409.1678(1)(b), F.S.

³³ Section 409.1678(2)(a), F.S.

³⁴ Section 409.1678(2)(c), F.S. Safe houses must also be licensed under s. 409.175, F.S.

³⁵ Section 409.1678(2)(d), F.S.

³⁶ Section 409.1678(2)(f), F.S.

Safe Foster Homes

A “safe foster home” is a family foster home certified by DCF to care for sexually exploited children.³⁷ The state requires safe foster homes provide the same services and meet the same requirements as safe houses, except the requirement to have staff awake and on duty 24 hours a day does not apply.³⁸

Additional Residential Facilities

Traditional residential facilities serve both children and adults who are victims of sexual exploitation. If these facilities serve adults, they cannot be designated safe houses or safe foster homes.³⁹

Public Records Exemption Under Review

In 2015, the Legislature created public record exemptions for information about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, residential facilities serving victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking. Specifically, the information regarding the location of these facilities held by an agency is confidential and exempt from public records requirements. However, the confidential and exempt information may be provided to any agency as necessary to maintain health and safety standards and to address emergency situations in the residential facility. The public record exemptions do not apply to facilities licensed by the Agency for Health Care Administration.⁴⁰

The 2015 public necessity statement⁴¹ for the exemptions provides that:

Safe houses, safe foster homes, and other residential facilities serving victims of sexual exploitation . . . or adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity, are intended as refuges for sexually exploited victims from those who exploited them. If the individuals who victimized these people were able to learn the location of such facilities, they may attempt to contact their victims, exploit their vulnerabilities, and return them to the situations in which they were victimized. Even without the return of these victims to their former situations, additional contact with those who victimized them would have the effect of continuing their victimization and inhibiting their recoveries. Additionally, knowledge about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, and other residential facilities serving victims of sexual exploitation . . . or adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity, could enable other individuals to locate and attempt to victimize the residents.⁴²

³⁷ Section 409.1678(1)(a), F.S.

³⁸ Section 409.1678(2)(c)5., F.S.

³⁹ Section 409.1678(1)(a) and (b), F.S. The definitions of “safe foster home” and “safe house” are specifically restricted to “sexually exploited children.”

⁴⁰ Chapter 2015-147, L.O.F., codified as ss. 409.1678(6) and 787.06(9), F.S.

⁴¹ FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c), requires each public record exemption state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption.

⁴² Chapter 2015-147, L.O.F.

During the 2019 interim, Committee staff met with staff from DCF and the Department of Legal Affairs (DLA) to discuss the exemptions as part of the review process. DCF, the entity which certifies safe houses and safe foster homes, stated that as of 2019 there were seven safe houses and 28 safe foster homes operating in the state. DCF and DLA staff indicated that they have not received any complaints concerning the exemptions nor did they encounter issues in implementing the exemptions. Neither agency was aware of any litigation involving the exemptions. DCF and DLA recommended the exemptions be reenacted as is.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill removes the scheduled repeal date of the public record exemptions, thereby maintaining the confidential and exempt status for information about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, other residential facilities serving child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity.

The bill takes effect on October 1, 2020.

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:

Voting 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 or expanded public record exemption. The bill continues the current public records exemption under sunset review; it does not expand this exemption or create a new one. Therefore, a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting for final passage of the bill is not required.

Public Necessity Statement

Article I, s. 24(c), of the State Constitution requires a bill that creates or expands an exemption to the public records requirements to state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption. The bill continues the current public records exemption under sunset review; it does not expand this exemption or create a new one. Therefore, the bill does not require a public necessity statement.

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 public records exemption appears to be a reasonable measure to prevent release of information about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, other residential facilities serving child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity.

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:

The private sector will continue to be subject to the cost associated with an agency making redactions in response to a public records request.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state or local governments. Costs incurred by an agency in responding to public records requests regarding these exemptions should continue to be offset by authorized fees.⁴³

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

⁴³ Section 119.07(2) and (4), F.S.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends sections 409.1678 and 787.06 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.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
