

**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 Appropriations

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BILL: SB 6A

INTRODUCER: Senator Hutson

SUBJECT: Public Records and Public Meetings Exemptions/Florida Gaming Control Commission

DATE: May 14, 2021                      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

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	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Kraemer/Imhof</u>	<u>Sadberry</u>	<u>AP</u>	<u>Pre-meeting</u>
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 6A, which is linked to the passage of SB 4A (Gaming Enforcement), provides that information obtained by the Florida Gaming Control Commission (commission) which is exempt or confidential and exempt from the public records requirements in s. 119.07(1)(a), F.S., and section 24(c) of Article I of the State Constitution, shall retain its exempt or confidential and exempt status. The information may be released by the commission to other governmental entities as needed in the performance of its official duties and responsibilities, but such entities must maintain the exempt or confidential and exempt status of the information.

The bill provides an open meetings exemption for portions of the commission’s meetings during which exempt or confidential and exempt information is discussed. The bill provides the process for meetings that are closed to the public. Under the bill, the entire closed session must be recorded, and such recording must be maintained by the commission. Only members of the commission, Department of Legal Affairs or commission staff supporting the commission’s function, and other persons whose presence is necessary for the presentation of exempt or confidential and exempt information may be allowed to attend the exempted portions of commission meetings.

Under the bill, recording of, and any minutes and records generated during a closed portion of a commission meeting are confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, until such time as the information discussed is no longer exempt or confidential and exempt.

This open meetings exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will repeal on October 2, 2026, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature.

The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

Section 24(c) of Article I 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 or public meeting exemption. Because the bill creates a new 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 is not expected to impact state or local revenues and expenditures.

The bill will become effective on the same date that SB 4A (Gaming Enforcement) or similar legislation takes effect, if such legislation is adopted in the same legislative session or an extension thereof and becomes a law.

## II. Present Situation:

### Public Records

Section 24(a) of Article I 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 section 24(a) of Article I of the State Constitution.<sup>1</sup> The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption<sup>2</sup> and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Public policy regarding access to government records is addressed further in s. 119.07(1)(a), F.S., which guarantees every person a right to inspect and copy any state, county, or municipal record, unless the record is exempt. 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 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; and
- Protect trade or business secrets.<sup>5</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

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

<sup>3</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

<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.

## Open Meetings Laws

The State Constitution also provides that the public has a right to access governmental meetings.<sup>7</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>8</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>9</sup>

Public policy regarding access to government meetings is also addressed in the Florida Statutes. Section 286.011, F.S., which is also known as the “Government in the Sunshine Law,”<sup>10</sup> or the “Sunshine Law,”<sup>11</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, to be open to the public.<sup>12</sup> The board or commission must provide the public reasonable notice of such meetings.<sup>13</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>14</sup> Minutes of a public meeting must be promptly recorded and open to public inspection.<sup>15</sup>

Failure to abide by open meetings requirements will invalidate any resolution, rule, or formal action adopted at a meeting.<sup>16</sup> A public officer or member of a governmental entity who violates the Sunshine Law is subject to civil and criminal penalties.<sup>17</sup>

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>18</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>19</sup> A statutory exemption which does not meet these two criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(b).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* Meetings of the Legislature are governed by section 4(e) of Article III of the State 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>10</sup> *Times Pub. Co. v. Williams*, 222 So. 2d 470, 472 (Fla. 2d DCA 1969).

<sup>11</sup> *Board of Public Instruction of Broward County v. Doran*, 224 So. 2d 693, 695 (Fla. 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Section 286.011(1)-(2), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Section 286.011(6), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 286.011(2), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 286.011(1), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 286.011(3), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Halifax Hosp. Medical Center v. News-Journal Corp.*, 724 So. 2d 567 (Fla. 1999).

### **Gaming Control Commission**

SB 4A creates s. 16.71, F.S., to establish a Gaming Control Commission (commission), to be administratively housed in the Department of Legal Affairs, Office of the Attorney General. The commission is a separate budget entity and serves as the agency head. The commission is not subject to control, supervision, or direction by the Department of Legal Affairs or the Attorney General in the performance of its duties, including but not limited to personnel, purchasing transactions involving real or personal property, and budget matters.

The commission consists of five members, one from each appellate district, to be appointed by the Governor by January 1, 2022, subject to Senate confirmation.

SB 4A requires the commission to meet at the call of the chair, or at the request of a majority (three members constitute a quorum) of its members. SB 4A also establishes the powers and duties of the commission.

SB 4A authorizes the commission to subpoena witnesses and compel their attendance and testimony, administer oaths and affirmations, take evidence, and require by subpoena the production of any books, papers, records, or other items relevant to the commission's duties or powers. The commission may meet in any city or county of the state.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

**Section 1** creates s. 16.716, F.S., to provide that information obtained by the commission that is exempt or confidential and exempt<sup>21</sup> from s. 119.07(1), F.S., or s. 24(a) Art I. of the State Constitution shall retain its exempt or confidential and exempt status. The information may be released by the commission to other governmental entities as needed in the performance of its official duties and responsibilities, but such entities must maintain the exempt or confidential and exempt status of the information.

The bill provides portions of commission meetings during which information that is exempt or confidential and exempt is discussed are exempt from s. 286.011, F.S., and s. 24(b), Art I. of the State Constitution.

The bill provides:

- The commission chair must advise the commission at a public meeting that, in connection with the performance of a commission duty, it is necessary that the commission hear or discuss information that is exempt or confidential and exempt.

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<sup>21</sup> There is a difference between records the Legislature designates 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. Sch. Bd. of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), *review denied* 892 So.2d 1015 (Fla. 2004); *City of Rivera Beach v. Barfield*, 642 So.2d 1135 (Fla. 4th DCA 1994); *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So.2d 683, 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 Op. Att'y Gen. Fla. (1985).

- The chair's declaration of necessity for closure and the specific reasons for such necessity must be stated in a document that is a public record that must be filed with the official records of the commission.
- The entire closed session must be recorded. The recording must be maintained by the commission and include the times of commencement and termination of the closed session, all discussion and proceedings, and the names of all persons present. No portion of the session may be off the record. The commission must maintain a recording of such meeting.

Further, only members of the commission, Department of Legal Affairs or commission staff supporting the commission's function, and other persons whose presence is necessary for the presentation of exempt or confidential and exempt information may be allowed to attend the exempted portions of the commission meetings. The commission must assure that any authorized closure of its meetings is limited, in order to maintain the general policy in Florida in favor of public meetings.

The bill provides the recording of, and any minutes and records generated during a closed portion of a commission meeting are confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, until such time as the information discussed is no longer exempt or confidential and exempt.

This open meeting exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will repeal on October 2, 2026, unless the Legislature reviews and reenacts the exemption by that date.

**Section 2** provides public necessity statement as required by section 24(c) of Article I of the State Constitution. As to information obtained by the commission, the public necessity statement provides in the absence of this exemption, sensitive confidential or exempt information would be disclosed. As to portions of meetings of the commission at which confidential and exempt information is discussed, the public necessity statement providing the release of confidential and exempt information via a public meeting defeats the purpose of a public records exemption, and the harm to the public that would result from the release of such information substantially outweighs any minimal public benefit derived therefrom.

The bill provides the following findings of the Legislature:

- The release of information before an active investigation is completed could jeopardize the ongoing investigation;
- It is a public necessity that the recording of, and any minutes and records generated during that portion of a commission meeting that is closed to the public be made confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, until such time as the information discussed is no longer exempt or confidential and exempt.
- This limited public record exemption ensures that the information discussed during the closed meeting remains protected while also allowing the commission to perform its statutory duties and responsibilities.

**Section 3** provides this act takes effect on the same date that SB 4A (Gaming Enforcement) or similar legislation takes effect, if such legislation is adopted in the same legislative session or an extension thereof and becomes a law.

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

The mandate restrictions do not apply because the bill does not require counties and municipalities to spend funds, reduce counties' or municipalities' ability to raise revenue, or reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties and municipalities.

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

Section 24(c) of Article I 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 or public meeting exemption. The bill creates a new public meetings exemption. Thus, the bill requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.

**Public Necessity Statement**

Section 24(c) of Article I of the State Constitution requires a public necessity statement for a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates a new public meetings exemption. Section 2 of the bill contains a statement of public necessity for the exemption.

**Breadth of Exemption**

Section 24(c) of Article I of the State Constitution requires a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The bill creates a public meetings exemption, which does not appear to be broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

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

None.

**E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None.

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

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The commission may experience increased workload and incur associated costs in complying with the exemptions created by the bill in handling public records requests, redacting confidential and exempt information prior to releasing a record, and closing portions of commission meetings. However, it is anticipated that any associated costs could be handled with existing resources.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 16.716 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.