

**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 Community Affairs

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BILL: SB 1678

INTRODUCER: Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee

SUBJECT: OGSR/Agency Personnel Information

DATE: March 24, 2014

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	Kim	McVaney	GO	<b>GO SPB 7080 as introduced</b>
1.	Stearns	Yeatman	CA	<b>Favorable</b>
2.			RC	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 1678 reenacts the existing public records exemption for former and current agency employees' Social Security numbers under s. 119.071(4)(a), F.S. This bill provides that an agency may disclose an employee's Social Security number if required by law, a court order, if another agency needs the Social Security number in order to perform its duties, or if an employee consents to the release of his or her Social Security number. This bill eliminates the sunset date of the exemption, thus continuing the current public records exemption.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Public Records and Open Meetings Requirements**

The Florida Constitution specifies requirements for public access to government records and meetings. It provides every person the right to inspect or copy any public record made or received in connection with the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, or of persons acting on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> The records of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches are specifically included.<sup>2</sup> The Florida Constitution also requires all meetings of any collegial public body of the executive branch of state government or of any local government, at which official acts are to be taken or at which public business of such body is to be transacted or discussed, to be open and noticed to the public.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes specify conditions under which public access must be provided to government records and meetings. The Public Records Act<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

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

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 119, F.S.

guarantees every person's right to inspect and copy any state or local government public record<sup>5</sup> at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record.<sup>6</sup> The Sunshine Law<sup>7</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 noticed and open to the public.<sup>8</sup>

Only the Legislature may create an exemption to public records or open meetings requirements.<sup>9</sup> Such an exemption must be created by general law and must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption.<sup>10</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>11</sup> and must pass by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting in each house of the Legislature.<sup>12</sup>

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

The Open Government Sunset Review Act, s. 119.15, F.S., prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings

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<sup>5</sup> Section 119.011(12), F.S., defines "public records" 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" to mean 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." The Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records (*see Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So.2d 32 (Fla. 1992)).

<sup>6</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 286.011, F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 286.011(1)-(2), F.S. The Sunshine Law does not apply to the Legislature; rather, open meetings requirements for the Legislature are set out in Art. III, s. 4(e) of the Florida Constitution. That section requires the rules of procedure of each house to provide that:

- All legislative committee and subcommittee meetings of each house and of joint conference committee meetings must be open and noticed to the public; and
- 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 or to take formal legislative action, must be reasonably open to the public.

<sup>9</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c). 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 Board 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 2004); and *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 the statutory exemption (*see Attorney General Opinion 85-62*, August 1, 1985).

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

<sup>11</sup> The bill may, however, contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

<sup>12</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

exemptions.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

Section 119.15, F.S., 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 to meet such public purpose.<sup>15</sup> An exemption serves an identifiable purpose if it meets one of the following purposes:

- It allows the state or its political subdivision to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;
- It protects 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; or
- It protects trade or business secrets.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to finding the exemption serves one of the above purposes, the Legislature must find that the purpose of the exemption outweighs open government policy and cannot be accomplished without the exemption.

The Act also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.<sup>17</sup>

When reenacting an exemption that will otherwise be repealed, a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote are required for passage if the exemption is expanded.<sup>18</sup> A public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are not required if the exemption is reenacted with grammatical or stylistic changes that do not expand the exemption, if the exemption is narrowed, or if an exception<sup>19</sup> to the exemption is created.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</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>14</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</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>18</sup> An exemption is expanded when it is amended to include more records, information, or meetings or to include meetings as well as records, or records as well as meetings.

<sup>19</sup> An example of an exception to a public records exemption would be allowing an additional agency access to confidential and exempt records.

<sup>20</sup> See *State of Florida v. Ronald Knight*, 661 So.2d 344 (Fla. 4th DCA 1995) (holding that nothing in s. 24, art. I of the Florida Constitution requires exceptions to a public records exemption to contain a public necessity statement).

### **Exemption Under Review: Agency Personnel Social Security Numbers**

Section 119.071(4)(a), F.S., provides that the Social Security numbers of all current and former agency employees are confidential and exempt from public disclosure under s. 119.071(1), F.S., and s. 24, Art. 1 of the Florida Constitution. Section 119.071(4)(a), F.S., currently does not contain any means for agencies to disclose employee Social Security numbers.<sup>21</sup> This exemption will stand repealed on October 2, 2014, unless saved from repeal by the Legislature.

### **Review Findings and Recommendations**

On August 16, 2013, the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee and the House Government Oversight Subcommittee surveyed state agencies regarding the need to keep agency personnel Social Security numbers exempt from public disclosure under s. 119.071(4)(a), F.S. Twenty-five agencies responded, and all of the agencies stated that s. 119.071(4)(a), F.S., should not be repealed. Several agencies cited the potential for identity theft and criminal activity as the rationale for keeping employees' Social Security numbers exempt from public disclosure. Agencies reported that they currently release Social Security numbers to government entities in order to perform background checks, to process payroll information, or if their employees are the subject of criminal investigations. None of the agencies reported that this exemption had been the subject of litigation.

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

**Section 1** provides agencies the ability to keep employee Social Security numbers confidential and exempt from public disclosure while permitting employing agencies to release Social Security numbers when necessary.

The bill clarifies the law by incorporating provisions for release within s. 119.071(4)(a), F.S. Agencies will be permitted to release employee Social Security numbers under the following conditions: as required by state or federal law or court order; to another agency or governmental entity when it is necessary for the receiving agency or entity to perform its duties; and when an employee gives his or her written consent.

The bill removes the October 2, 2014, repeal date of this public records exemption.

**Section 2** provides an effective date of October 1, 2014.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

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<sup>21</sup> Agencies can use s. 119.071(5), F.S., when disclosure is required.

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

This bill does not expand or create a public records exemption and therefore it is not subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, s. 119.15, F.S. This bill requires a simple majority vote for passage.

**C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

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

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

None.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 119.071 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.