

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/CS/HB 223 Public Records and Meetings/Postsecondary Education Executive Search
SPONSOR(S): Government Operations Subcommittee; Higher Education & Workforce Subcommittee;
Combee
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** CS/CS/SB 182

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Higher Education & Workforce Subcommittee	9 Y, 1 N, As CS	Banner	Sherry
2) Government Operations Subcommittee	8 Y, 4 N, As CS	Williamson	Williamson
3) Education Committee	12 Y, 6 N	Banner	Mizereck

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The bill creates an exemption from public record and public meeting requirements for information associated with the applicant recruitment process and discussions associated with the applicant search for certain state university and Florida College System (FCS) institution employees. Specifically, the bill provides that any personal identifying information of an applicant for president or provost of any state university or FCS institution is confidential and exempt from public record requirements. It also creates a public meeting exemption for any meeting held for the purpose of identifying or vetting applicants for president or provost of any state university or FCS institution.

The bill provides instances when the public meeting exemption does not apply. In addition, it provides that the identifying information of any applicants who comprise a final group of applicants must be released by the state university or FCS institution no later than 30 days before the date of the meeting at which a final action or vote is to be taken on the employment of the applicants. At that time, all documents containing such identifying information is no longer exempt of those applicants who comprise a final group of applicants.

The bill requires closed meetings to be reasonably noticed, and requires a complete recording to be made of the closed portion of the meeting.

The bill provides for repeal of the section on October 2, 2020, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. It also provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on state or local governments.

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 public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates public record and public meeting exemptions; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

Public Records Law

Article I, s. 24(a) of the State Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records. The section guarantees every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

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.

Public Meetings Law

Article I, s. 24(b) of the State Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government meetings. The section requires that all meetings of any collegial public body of the executive branch of state government or of any collegial public body of a county, municipality, school district, or special district, at which official acts are to be taken or at which public business of such body is to be transacted or discussed, be open and noticed to the public.

Public policy regarding access to government meetings also is addressed in the Florida Statutes. Section 286.011, F.S., known as the "Government in the Sunshine Law" or "Sunshine Law," further requires that all meetings of any board or commission of any state agency or authority or of any agency or authority of any county, municipal corporation, or political subdivision, at which official acts are to be taken be open to the public at all times.¹ The board or commission must provide reasonable notice of all public meetings.² 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.³ Minutes of a public meeting must be promptly recorded and open to public inspection.⁴

Public Record and Public Meeting Exemptions

The Legislature may provide by general law for the exemption of records and meetings from the requirements of Article I, s. 24(a) and (b) of the State Constitution. The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption (public necessity statement) and must be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.⁵

Furthermore, the Open Government Sunset Review Act⁶ 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:⁷

- Allows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption;
- 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
- Protects trade or business secrets.

¹ Section 286.011(1), F.S.

² *Ibid.*

³ Section 286.011(6), F.S.

⁴ Section 286.011(2), F.S.

⁵ Art. I, s. 24(c), Fla. Const.

⁶ Section 119.15, F.S.

⁷ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

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.⁸

Search Committees

Oftentimes, when looking to fill a vacant president, provost, or dean position, state universities and Florida College System (FCS) institutions⁹ establish a search committee, which may be comprised of members from an institution's board of trustees, faculty or student representatives, members of the community, a member from the Board of Governors or State Board of Education, and other potentially interested persons. The purpose of the committee is to locate qualified applicants who are interested in filling the vacant position at the university or institution, vetting applicants, and selecting a candidate to fill the position.¹⁰

The search committee often retains the services of a consulting firm for the purpose of conducting the search for a president or provost. It is typical for the consultant to make the initial contact with a potential applicant to determine if the person is interested in applying to fill the vacancy at the state university or FCS institution.

Information obtained by a search committee or consultant, including applications and other information gathered by a committee or consultant regarding applicants, must be made available for copying and inspection upon request. In addition, any meetings associated with the search process, including vetting of applicants, are open to the public.¹¹

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill creates an exemption from public record requirements for information associated with the applicant recruitment process and an exemption from public meeting requirements for discussions associated with the applicant search.

Specifically, the bill provides that any personal identifying information of an applicant for president or provost of any state university or FCS institution is exempt¹² from public record requirements.

The bill also creates a public meeting exemption for any portion of a meeting:

- Held for the purpose of identifying or vetting potential applicants for president or provost of any state university or FCS institution.
- That would disclose identifying information of an applicant for president or provost of a state university or FCS institution.

Any portion of a closed meeting must be reasonably noticed, and no portion of the closed meeting may be held off the record. A recording must be made of the closed portion of the meeting. The bill provides that the recording is exempt from public record requirements.

⁸ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

⁹ The board of trustees for a FCS institution is charged with appointing an institution president and may appoint a search committee for this purpose. Section 1001.64(19), F.S.

¹⁰ The Board of Governors must confirm the selected candidate for president of a state university Section 1001.706(6)(a), F.S.

¹¹ FCS institutions and state universities are considered state agencies, subject to public records and public meetings laws. *See Wood v. Marston*, 442 So. 2d 934, 938 (Fla. 1983) (holding that a University of Florida screening committee was subject to Florida's Sunshine Law); *Rhea v. District Bd. Of Trustees of Santa Fe College*, 2013 WL 950544 at 3, n. 1 (Fla. 1st DCA 2013) (noting that Santa Fe College, as part of the Florida College System, is a state agency having a duty to provide access to public records).

¹² 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).

The public meeting exemptions do not apply to a meeting held for the purpose of establishing qualifications of potential applicants or any compensation framework to be offered to potential applicants. Any meeting or interview held after a final group of applicants has been established and held for the purpose of making a final selection to fill the position of president or provost is subject to public meeting requirements. In addition, the names of any applicants who comprise a final group of applicants must be released by the state university or FCS institution no later than 30 days before the date of the meeting at which final action or vote is to be taken on the employment of the applicants. All documents containing personal identifying information of any applicants who comprise a final group of applicants become subject to public record requirements when the applicants' names are released.

The bill provides that the section is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will be repealed on October 2, 2020, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. It also provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Creates s. 1004.097, F.S., to provide public record and public meeting exemptions associated with a search conducted by a state university or FCS institution for the purpose of identifying or vetting applicants for president or provost.

Section 2. Provides a statement of public necessity as required by the State Constitution.

Section 3. Provides an effective date of October 1, 2015.

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:

The bill likely could create a minimal fiscal impact on state universities and FCS institutions, because staff responsible for complying with public record requests could require training related to creation of the public record exemption. In addition, state universities and FCS institutions could incur costs associated with redacting the exempt information prior to releasing a record. The costs, however, would be absorbed, as they are part of the day-to-day responsibilities of the universities and institutions. In addition, there may be minimal fiscal costs associated with the requirement to record the closed portion of a meeting.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. This bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

Vote 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 public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates public record and public meeting exemptions; thus, it requires a two-thirds vote for final passage.

Public Necessity Statement

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a public necessity statement for a newly created or expanded public record or public meeting exemption. The bill creates public record and public meeting exemptions; thus, it includes a public necessity statement.

Breadth of Exemption

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a newly created 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 record exemption for any personal identifying information of an applicant for president or provost of any state university or FCS institution, in addition to a public meeting exemption for any meetings wherein such information is discussed or such applicants are vetted. The exemptions do not appear to be in conflict with the constitutional requirement that the exemptions be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On March 10, 2015, the Higher Education and Workforce Subcommittee adopted a strike all amendment to the bill and reported the bill favorably as a committee substitute. The amendment conformed the bill to Senate Bill 182 by:

- providing that records be exempt rather than both confidential and exempt;
- requiring closed meetings to be recorded and those recordings exempt from public records; and
- extending the timeframe that records of finalists and meetings regarding finalists be open to the public from 10 days to 30 days prior to the final vote or action.

On March 24, 2015, the Government Operations Subcommittee adopted an amendment and reported the bill favorably as a committee substitute. The amendment removed the public record and public meeting exemption for those searches for a dean of a state university or FCS institution.

This analysis is drafted to the committee substitute as passed by the Government Operations Subcommittee.