

**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: CS/SB 210

INTRODUCER: Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee and Senator Passidomo

SUBJECT: Public Records/Public Guardians

DATE: March 3, 2017                      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Crosier	Hendon	CF	<b>Fav/CS</b>
2.	Kim	Ferrin	GO	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
3.			RC	

**Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:**  
COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Technical Changes

**I. Summary:**

CS/SB 210 creates a public records exemption for the identifying and location information of current and former public guardians and their spouses and children. The bill provides for retroactive application, and includes a constitutionally required public necessity statement. The exemption will stand repealed on October 2, 2022, pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and unless it is reenacted.

This bill requires a two-thirds vote from each chamber for passage.

There is an effective date of July 1, 2017, and there is no fiscal impact as a result of the legislation.

**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.*

In addition to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Statutes provides that the public may access legislative and executive branch records.<sup>3</sup> Chapter 119, F.S., constitutes the main body of public records laws, and is known as the Public Records Act.<sup>4</sup> The Public Records Act states that

it 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>5</sup>

According to the Public Records Act, 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> A violation of the Public Records Act may result in civil or criminal liability.<sup>8</sup>

The Legislature may create an exemption to public records requirements.<sup>9</sup> An exemption must pass by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate.<sup>10</sup> In addition, an exemption must explicitly lay out the public necessity justifying the exemption, and the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the exemption.<sup>11</sup> A statutory exemption which does not meet these criteria may be unconstitutional and may not be judicially saved.<sup>12</sup>

When creating a public records exemption, the Legislature may provide that a record is “confidential and exempt” or “exempt.”<sup>13</sup> Records designated as “confidential and exempt” may be released by the records custodian only under the circumstances defined by the Legislature.

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<sup>3</sup> The Public Records Act does not apply to legislative or judicial records. *Locke v. Hawkes*, 595 So. 2d 32 (Fla. 1992). Also see *Times Pub. Co. v. Ake*, 660 So. 2d 255 (Fla. 1995). The Legislature’s records are public pursuant to s. 11.0431, F.S. Public records exemptions for the Legislatures are primarily located in s. 11.0431(2)-(3), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.01(1), F.S.

<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” 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.”

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

<sup>8</sup> Section 119.10, F.S. Public records laws are found throughout the Florida Statutes, as are the penalties for violating those laws.

<sup>9</sup> FLA. CONST., art. I, s. 24(c).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

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

<sup>12</sup> *Halifax Hosp. Medical Center v. New-Journal Corp.*, 724 So. 2d 567 (Fla. 1999). See also *Baker County Press, Inc. v. Baker County Medical Services, Inc.*, 870 So. 2d 189 (Fla. 1st DCA 2004).

<sup>13</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 School Board of Seminole*, 874 So. 2d 48 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).

Records designated as “exempt” are not required to be made available for public inspection, but may be released at the discretion of the records custodian under certain circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

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

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (referred to hereafter as the “OGSR”) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended public records or open meetings exemptions.<sup>15</sup> The OGSR 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.<sup>16</sup>

The OGSR 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>17</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>18</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>19</sup> or
- It protects trade or business secrets.<sup>20</sup>

The OGSR also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.<sup>21</sup> In examining an exemption, the OGSR asks the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption.

If, in reenacting an exemption, the exemption is expanded, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote for passage are required.<sup>22</sup> If the exemption is reenacted without substantive changes or if the exemption is narrowed, then a public necessity statement and a two-thirds vote

<sup>14</sup> *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So. 2d 687 (Fla. 5th DCA 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15, F.S. Section 119.15(4)(b), F.S., provides that an exemption is considered to be substantially amended if it is expanded to include more information or to include meetings. The OGSR does not apply to an exemption that is required by federal law or that applies solely to the Legislature or the State Court System pursuant to s. 119.15(2), F.S.

<sup>16</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>17</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

<sup>18</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

<sup>19</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>20</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

<sup>21</sup> Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S. The specified questions are:

1. What specific records or meetings are affected by the exemption?
2. Whom does the exemption uniquely affect, as opposed to the general public?
3. What is the identifiable public purpose or goal of the exemption?
4. Can the information contained in the records or discussed in the meeting be readily obtained by alternative means?  
If so, how?
5. Is the record or meeting protected by another exemption?
6. Are there multiple exemptions for the same type of record or meeting that it would be appropriate to merge?

<sup>22</sup> FLA. CONST. art. I, s. 24(c).

for passage are *not* required. If the Legislature allows an exemption to sunset, the previously exempt records will remain exempt unless otherwise provided for by law.<sup>23</sup>

## Guardianship

Guardianship is a concept whereby a “guardian” acts for another, called a “ward,” whom the law regards as incapable of managing his or her own affairs due to age or incapacity. Guardianships are generally disfavored due to the loss of individual civil rights, and a guardian may be appointed only if the court finds there is no sufficient alternative to guardianship.

There are two main forms of guardianship: guardianship over the person or guardianship over the property, which may be limited or plenary.<sup>24</sup> For adults, a guardianship may be established when a person has demonstrated that he or she is unable to manage his or her own affairs. If the adult is competent, this can be accomplished voluntarily. However, in situations where an individual’s mental competence is in question, an involuntary guardianship may be established through the adjudication of incompetence which is based on the determination of a court appointed examination committee.<sup>25</sup>

Florida courts have long recognized the relationship between a guardian and his or her ward as a classic fiduciary relationship.<sup>26</sup> A fiduciary relationship exists between two persons when one of them is under a duty to act for or to give advice for the benefit of another upon matters within the scope of that relationship.<sup>27</sup> The most basic duty of a fiduciary is the duty of loyalty: a fiduciary must refrain from self-dealing, must not take unfair advantage of the ward, must act in the best interest of the ward, and must disclose material facts.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the duty of loyalty, a fiduciary also owes a duty of care to carry out its responsibilities in an informed and considered manner.

Section 744.361, F.S., imposes specific duties upon a guardian consistent with the basic duties of a fiduciary including protecting and preserving the property of the ward’s overall physical and social health. A guardian must file with the court an initial guardianship report,<sup>29</sup> an annual guardianship report,<sup>30</sup> and an annual accounting of the ward’s property.<sup>31</sup> The reports provide evidence of the guardian’s faithful execution of his or her fiduciary duties.<sup>32</sup>

At the heart of a court’s interpretation of a fiduciary relationship is a concern that persons who assume trustee-like positions with discretionary power over the interests of others might breach their duties and abuse their position. Section 744.446(1), F.S., explicitly states that the “fiduciary relationship which exists between the guardian and the ward may not be used for the private gain of the guardian other than the remuneration for fees and expenses provided by law.” If a

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<sup>23</sup> Section 119.15(7), F.S.

<sup>24</sup> Section 744.102(9)(a) and (b), F.S.

<sup>25</sup> Sections 744.102(12), 744.3201, 744.341, F.S.

<sup>26</sup> *Lawrence v. Norris*, 563 So. 2d 195, 197 (Fla. 1st DCA 1990). Section 744.361(1), F.S.

<sup>27</sup> *Doe v. Evans*, 814 So. 2d 370, 374 (Fla. 2002).

<sup>28</sup> *Capital Bank v. MVP, Inc.* 644 So. 2d 515, 520 (Fla. 3d DCA 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Section 744.362, F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Section 744.367, F.S.

<sup>31</sup> Section 744.3678, F.S.

<sup>32</sup> Sections 744.368(1) and 744.369, F.S.

guardian breaches his or her fiduciary duty, a court will intervene and “take the necessary actions to protect the ward and the ward’s assets.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Office of the Public and Professional Guardians**

The Legislature created the Statewide Public Guardianship Office in 1999 to provide oversight for all public guardians.<sup>34</sup> The Statewide Public Guardianship Office was renamed the Office of the Public and Professional Guardians in 2006.<sup>35</sup> A public guardian may serve “an incapacitated person if there is no family member or friend, other person, bank, or corporation willing and qualified to serve as guardian.”<sup>36</sup> A person serving as a public guardian is considered a professional guardian for purposes of regulation, education, and registration.<sup>37</sup> A public guardian may be an appointee of the Office of the Public and Professional Guardians or a contract employee of a nonprofit corporation.<sup>38</sup> Public guardianship offices are located in all 20 judicial circuits in the state.<sup>39</sup>

Currently, the names, home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, and places of employment of spouses and children of public guardians as well as the names and location of schools and day care facilities of the children of public guardians are subject to release pursuant to a public records request.

Wards, by definition, lack capacity and occasionally become disgruntled. Wards have threatened and harmed their public guardians. For example, in June of 2011, a ward found his guardian’s home address through Miami-Dade property records. The ward called the police and told them that the guardian was attempting suicide. The police arrived at the guardian’s home at 1:30 a.m. and tried looking inside of the house, which alarmed the public guardian. The guardian had to prove to the police that she was not a danger to herself. The ward later confessed that he hoped to have the guardian Baker Acted. In addition, wards have pointed guns at guardians and kicked and hit them. Wards have also and left voice messages threatening to kill themselves and their guardians and have used the internet to offer money to have people killed.<sup>40</sup>

### **Effect of Proposed Changes:**

**Section 1** creates s. 744.21031, F.S., to allow the home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, places of employment, and photographs of current or former public guardians; the names, home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, and places of employment of the spouses and children of current or former guardians; and the names and locations of schools and day care facilities attend by the children of current and former public guardians to be exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. The public guardian must make reasonable efforts to protect such information from being accessible through other means

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<sup>33</sup> Section 744.446(4), F.S.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 99-277, Laws of Fla.

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 2016-40, Laws of Fla.

<sup>36</sup> Section 744.2007(1), F.S.

<sup>37</sup> Section 744.102(17), F.S.

<sup>38</sup> Section 744.2006, F.S.

<sup>39</sup> Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee staff meeting with the Department of Elder Affairs on February 2, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Email packet from Carlos McDonald, Executive Director, Guardianship Program of Dade County, Inc., on file with the Senate Committee on Governmental Oversight.

available to the public. The bill also provides that the public records exemption has retroactive effect.

The public records exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act pursuant to s. 119.15, F.S., and will be repealed October 2, 2022, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

**Section 2** states that the Legislature finds it is a public necessity that the identifying and location information of current and former public guardians, their spouses and children be exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Article I of the State Constitution if the public guardian has made reasonable efforts to protect such information from being accessible through other means available to the public.

The Legislature also finds that the release of identifying and location information of current and former public guardians and their family members might place them in danger of physical and emotional harm from disgruntled individuals who make act inappropriately or seek revenge due to actions taken by public guardians. The Legislature further finds that harm that may result from the release of such personal identifying and location information outweighs any public benefit that may be derived from the disclosure of the information.

**Section 3** provides an effective date of July 1, 2017.

### III. **Constitutional Issues:**

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

None.

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

##### **Voting Requirement**

Article I, Section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of each chamber for public records exemptions to pass.

##### **Breadth of Exemption**

Article I, Section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution requires a newly created public records exemption to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the state purpose of the law. The bill exempts certain identifying and location information of current and former public guardians, their spouses and children if the guardian provides a written statement that he or she has made reasonable efforts to protect such information from being accessible through other means available to the public. The public necessity for the exemption provides that guardians and their family members are subject to threats of emotional and physical harm from disgruntled individuals. The exemption from disclosure would help protect guardians and their families. This bill appears to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the public necessity for this public records exemption.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**IV. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Private contractors will have to redact public guardian's information if a public records request is made. This cost will be absorbed through existing resources.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Government entities will have to redact a public guardian's information if a public records request is made. This cost will be absorbed through existing resources.

**V. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VI. Related Issues:**

None.

**VII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 744.21031 of the Florida Statutes.

**VIII. Additional Information:**

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

**CS by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs on February 21, 2017:**

The amendment moves the public records exemption for current and former public guardians from s. 119.071, F.S. and creates s. 744.21031, F.S., placing the public records exemption in Part II of the Professional and Public Guardianship statutes.

B. Amendments:

None.