

**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 Criminal Justice

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BILL: SB 344

INTRODUCER: Senator Perry

SUBJECT: Public Records/Nonjudicial Record of the Arrest of a Minor

DATE: November 1, 2021

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Stokes	Jones	CJ	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.			ACJ	
3.			AP	

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**I. Summary:**

SB 344 is the public records exemption linked to SB 342. This bill provides that a nonjudicial record of the arrest of a minor who has successfully completed a diversion program and is eligible for expunction is made confidential and exempt from public disclosure, except that the record must be made available only to criminal justice agencies for specified purposes.

SB 342 amends s. 943.0582, F.S., to permit a juvenile who completed a diversion program for misdemeanor and felony offenses, other than a forcible felony, to apply to have the nonjudicial arrest record expunged. This expands the current law, which only permits juvenile diversion expunction for a misdemeanor offense.

Additionally, SB 342 amends s. 985.126, F.S., to permit a juvenile who completes a diversion program for any offense to lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge his or her participation in the program and the expunction of the nonjudicial arrest record. This expands the current law, which only permits a juvenile who completes diversion for a first-time misdemeanor offense to lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge his or her participation in the program and the expunction.

This bill is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and stands repealed on October 2, 2027, unless reviewed and saved from the repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Because this bill creates a public records exemption, it will require a two-thirds vote of each house in order to pass.

This bill takes effect on the same date as SB 342 or similar legislation takes effect. SB 342 is effective on July 1, 2022.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.420 governs public access to judicial branch records.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 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.”<sup>7</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> See Rule 1.48, *Rules and Manual of the Florida Senate*, (2020-2022) and Rule 14.1, *Rules of the Florida House of Representatives*, Edition 1, (2020-2022).

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.”

<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.”

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

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

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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

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.<sup>14</sup> Custodians of records designated as “confidential and exempt” may not disclose the record except under circumstances specifically defined by the Legislature.<sup>15</sup>

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

The Open Government Sunset Review Act<sup>16</sup> (the Act) prescribes a legislative review process for newly created or substantially amended<sup>17</sup> public records or open meetings exemptions, with specified exceptions.<sup>18</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>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> *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).

<sup>12</sup> *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).

<sup>13</sup> *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).

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

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

<sup>16</sup> Section 119.15, F.S.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Section 119.15(2)(a) and (b), F.S., provides 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.

<sup>19</sup> Section 119.15(3), F.S.

<sup>20</sup> 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;<sup>21</sup>
- 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;<sup>22</sup> or
- It protects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, such as trade or business secrets.<sup>23</sup>

The Act also requires specified questions to be considered during the review process.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

### **Juvenile Diversion Program Expunction**

The exceptions to accessibility of a criminal history record do not apply if the record has been sealed<sup>27</sup> or expunged.<sup>28</sup> The expunction of a criminal history record is the court-ordered physical destruction or obliteration of a record or portion of a record by any criminal justice agency

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<sup>21</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)1., F.S.

<sup>22</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>23</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b)3., F.S.

<sup>24</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>25</sup> See generally s. 119.15, F.S.

<sup>26</sup> Section 119.15(7), F.S.

<sup>27</sup> "Sealing of a criminal history record" means the preservation of a record under such circumstances that it is secure and inaccessible to any person not having a legal right of access to the record or the information contained and preserved therein. Section 943.045(19), F.S.

<sup>28</sup> Section 943.053(3)(b), F.S.

having custody of the record.<sup>29</sup> The following are authorized expungement processes for the criminal history record of a juvenile:

- Juvenile diversion;<sup>30</sup>
- Automatic juvenile;<sup>31</sup> and
- Early juvenile.<sup>32</sup>

Diversion refers to a program that is designed to keep a juvenile from entering the juvenile justice system through the legal process.<sup>33</sup>

The decision to refer a juvenile to a diversion program is at the discretion of either the law enforcement officer that confronted the juvenile at the time of the incident or the state attorney that has been referred the case. While participation in a diversion program may be restricted to misdemeanor offenses, there are some programs that enable a juvenile who has committed a felony to participate. In FY 2019-20, there were 2,770 juveniles who were referred to diversion programs for felony offenses.<sup>34</sup>

After completing an eligible diversion program, a juvenile seeking to have his or her nonjudicial arrest record expunged must:

- Submit an application for diversion expunction to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE).
- Submit, with the application, an official written statement from the state attorney for the county in which the arrest occurred certifying that:
  - He or she has completed the diversion program;
  - The arrest was for a misdemeanor; and
  - He or she has not otherwise been charged by the state attorney with or have been found to have committed, any criminal offense or comparable ordinance violation.
- Have not, before the application for expunction, been charged by the state attorney with, or found to have committed, any criminal offense or comparable ordinance violation.<sup>35</sup>

If the juvenile meets such criteria and submits the appropriate documentation, the FDLE must expunge the nonjudicial arrest record of the juvenile.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Criminal history records in the custody of the FDLE must be retained in all cases for purposes of evaluating subsequent requests by the subject of the record for sealing or expunction, or for purposes of recreating the record in the event an order to expunge is vacated by a court of competent jurisdiction. Section 943.045(16), F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Section 943.0582, F.S.

<sup>31</sup> Section 943.0515, F.S.

<sup>32</sup> Section 943.0515(1)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>33</sup> Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, *Glossary*, available at <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/youth-families/glossary> (last accessed October 21, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, *Delinquency Profile 2020, Statewide Diversion – Felony Youth*, available at <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/research/reports/reports-and-data/interactive-data-reports/delinquency-profile/delinquency-profile-dashboard> (last accessed October 21, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> Section 943.0582(3), F.S.

<sup>36</sup> Section 943.0582(3), F.S.

A criminal history record that is expunged under this section is only available to criminal justice agencies<sup>37</sup> for the purpose of determining eligibility for diversion programs, a criminal investigation, or making a prosecutorial decision. Records maintained by local criminal justice agencies in the county where the arrest occurred that are eligible for expunction under this section must be sealed.<sup>38</sup> A record sealed under s. 943.059, F.S., is available only to specified persons or entities, including criminal justice agencies for their respective purposes and when the subject of the record is a candidate for employment with a criminal justice agency.<sup>39</sup> A juvenile who successfully completes a diversion program for a first-time misdemeanor offense may lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge his or her participation in the program and the expunction of the nonjudicial arrest record, unless the inquiry is made by a criminal justice agency for one of the purposes stated above.<sup>40</sup>

A juvenile who receives an expunction under this section is not prevented from petitioning for the expunction or sealing of a later criminal history record for human trafficking victim expunction,<sup>41</sup> court ordered expunction,<sup>42</sup> or court ordered sealing,<sup>43</sup> if the juvenile is otherwise eligible for relief under those sections.<sup>44</sup>

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

SB 344 is the public records exemption linked to SB 342. This bill provides that a nonjudicial record of the arrest of a minor who has successfully completed a diversion program and is eligible for expunction is made confidential and exempt from public disclosure, except that the record must be made available only to criminal justice agencies for specified purposes.

SB 342 amends s. 943.0582, F.S., to permit a juvenile who completed a diversion program for misdemeanor and felony offenses, other than a forcible felony, to apply to have the nonjudicial arrest record expunged. This expands the current law, which only permits juvenile diversion expunction for a misdemeanor offense.

Additionally, SB 342 amends s. 985.126, F.S., to permit a juvenile who completes a diversion program for any offense to lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge his or her participation in the program and the expunction of the nonjudicial arrest record. This expands the current law, which only permits a juvenile who completes diversion for a first-time misdemeanor offense to lawfully deny or fail to acknowledge his or her participation in the program and the expunction.

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<sup>37</sup> “Criminal justice agency” means: a court; the FDLE; the DJJ; the protective investigations component of the Department of Children and Families, which investigates the crimes of abuse and neglect; and any other governmental agency or subunit thereof that performs the administration of criminal justice pursuant to a statute or rule of court and that allocates a substantial part of its annual budget to the administration of criminal justice. Section 942.045(11), F.S.

<sup>38</sup> Section 943.0582(2)(b)2., F.S.

<sup>39</sup> Section 943.059(6), F.S.

<sup>40</sup> Section 985.126(5), F.S.

<sup>41</sup> Section 943.0583, F.S.

<sup>42</sup> Section 943.0585, F.S.

<sup>43</sup> Section 943.059, F.S.

<sup>44</sup> Section 943.0582, F.S.

This bill is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and stands repealed on October 2, 2027, unless reviewed and saved from the repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

This bill provides a public necessity statement as required by Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution. The public necessity statement provides that:

The Legislature finds that it is a public necessity that the nonjudicial record of the arrest of a minor who successfully completed a diversion program for minors, which is sealed or expunged pursuant to s. 943.0582, Florida Statutes, be made confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), Florida Statutes, and s. 24(a), Article I of the State Constitution. The purpose of diversion programs is to redirect youth from the justice system with opportunities for programming, rehabilitation, and restoration. This purpose will be undermined if the nonjudicial record of arrest is not confidential and exempt. The presence of a nonjudicial record of arrest of a minor who completed a diversion program can jeopardize his or her ability to obtain education, employment, and other opportunities necessary to become a productive, contributing, self-sustaining member of society. Such negative consequences are unwarranted in cases in which the minor was successfully diverted from further delinquency proceedings through the completion of a diversion program. For these reasons, the Legislature finds that it is a public necessity that the criminal history records of minors which have received an expunction due to the successful completion of a diversion program be confidential and exempt from public records requirements.

This bill takes effect on the same date as SB 342 or similar legislation takes effect. As filed, SB 342 is effective July 1, 2022.

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

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

Not applicable. 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***

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 records or public meeting exemption. The bill creates a public record exemption for a nonjudicial record of arrest of a juvenile who has successfully completed a diversion program that is sealed or expunged and therefore 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 exemption. The bill creates a public record exemption for a nonjudicial record of arrest of a juvenile who has successfully completed a diversion program that is sealed or expunged. Section 2 of the bill provides 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 makes confidential and exempt limited types of nonjudicial arrest records. The exemption does not appear to be in conflict with the constitutional requirement that the exemption be no broader than necessary to accomplish its purpose.

**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:**

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

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

Indeterminate. The FDLE will incur minor costs relating to the redaction of exempt records.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.



**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends section 943.0582 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.)

B. **Amendments:**

None.

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

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