

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 319 Pub. Rec./Military Personnel and Their Families

SPONSOR(S): Holcomb, Rudman, and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 548

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 114 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 319 passed the House on March 6, 2024, as SB 548.

Current law provides several public record exemptions for certain identification and location information of specified current or former agency employees and their spouses and children. However, no exemption from public record requirements currently exists for United States military personnel.

The bill creates a public record exemption for the following identification and location information of current or former military personnel and their spouses and dependents:

- Home addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth of current and former military personnel, and the telephone numbers associated with the personal communication devices of such personnel;
- Home addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth of the spouses and dependents of current and former military personnel, and the telephone numbers associated with the personal communication devices of such spouses and dependents; and
- Names and locations of schools attended by the spouses of current and former military personnel, and schools or day care facilities attended by dependents of such personnel.

The bill defines "military personnel" to mean persons employed by the U.S. Department of Defense who have been authorized to access information deemed "secret" or "top secret" by the Federal Government, as well as current or former servicemembers of a special operations force.

In order for the exemption to apply, the military personnel member must submit to the custodial agency a written request that the information be exempt and a written statement that reasonable efforts have been made by the military personnel member to protect the identification and location information from being accessible through other means available to the public.

The bill provides that the public record exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will stand repealed on October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. It also provides a statement of public necessity as required by the Florida Constitution.

The bill may have a negative, but likely insignificant, fiscal impact on state and local governments.

The bill was approved by the Governor on April 26, 2024, ch. 2024-111, L.O.F., and became effective on that date.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

Public Records

The Florida Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records, guaranteeing every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.¹ The Legislature, however, may provide by general law an exemption² from public record requirements provided that the exemption passes by a two-thirds vote of each chamber, states with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption, and is no broader than necessary to meet its public purpose.³

Current law also addresses the public policy regarding access to government records, guaranteeing every person a right to inspect and copy any state, county, or municipal record, unless the record is exempt.⁴ Furthermore, the Open Government Sunset Review Act⁵ provides that a public record exemption may be created, revised, or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and the "Legislature finds that the purpose is sufficiently compelling to override the strong public policy of open government and cannot be accomplished without the exemption."⁶ An identifiable public purpose is served if the exemption meets 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; or
- Protect trade or business secrets.⁷

Pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, a new public record exemption or substantial amendment of an existing public record exemption is repealed on October 2nd of the fifth year following enactment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.⁸

Current Public Record Exemptions for Identification and Location Information

Current law provides several public record exemptions for identification and location information of specified current or former agency employees and their spouses and children.⁹ Identification and location information typically includes the home addresses,¹⁰ telephone numbers,¹¹ dates of birth, and photographs of specified agency employees and their spouses and children. Additionally, the places of employment of the spouses and children of the specified agency employees as well as the names and

¹ Art. I, s. 24(a), Fla. Const.

² A public record exemption means a provision of general law which provides that a specified record, or portion thereof, is not subject to the access requirements of s. 119.07(1), F.S., or s. 24, Art. I of the Florida Constitution. See s. 119.011(8), F.S.

³ Art. I, s. 24(c), Fla. Const.

⁴ See s. 119.01, F.S.

⁵ S. 119.15, F.S.

⁶ S. 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ S. 119.15(3), F.S.

⁹ See s. 119.071(4)(d), F.S.

¹⁰ The term "home addresses" means the dwelling location at which an individual resides and includes the physical address, mailing address, street address, parcel identification number, plot identification number, legal property description, neighborhood name and lot number, GPS coordinates, and any other descriptive property information that may reveal the home address. S. 119.071(4)(d)1.a., F.S.

¹¹ The term "telephone numbers" includes home telephone numbers, personal cellular telephone numbers, personal pager telephone numbers, and telephone numbers associated with personal communications devices. S. 119.071(4)(d)1.c., F.S.

locations of schools and day care facilities attended by those children are exempt from public record requirements.¹²

Current law also provides a public record exemption for specified identification and location information for certain federal officials, such as United States attorneys, assistant U.S. attorneys, U.S. Courts of Appeal judges, U.S. District Court judges, and U.S. Magistrates, as well as the spouses and children of such officials.¹³ In order for the exemption to apply, the attorney, judge, or magistrate must submit to the custodial agency a written request to exempt the information from public record requirements.¹⁴ In addition, the attorney, judge, or magistrate must submit 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.¹⁵

A similar public record exemption for the identification and location information of current or former members of the U.S. Armed Forces, their reserve components, and the National Guard, who served after September 11, 2001, as well as their spouses and dependents previously existed in statute. However, that exemption sunset on October 2, 2020.¹⁶

Effect of the Bill

The bill creates a public record exemption for the identification and location information of current and former military personnel and their spouses and dependents. The bill defines “military personnel” to mean persons employed by the U.S. Department of Defense who have been authorized to access information deemed “secret” or “top secret” by the Federal Government, as well as current or former servicemembers of a special operations force.¹⁷

Specifically, the public record exemption provides that the following identification and location information is exempt¹⁸ from public record requirements:

- Home addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth of current and former military personnel, and the telephone numbers associated with the personal communication devices of such personnel.
- Home addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth of the spouses and dependents of current and former military personnel, and the telephone numbers associated with the personal communication devices of such spouses and dependents.
- Names and locations of schools attended by the spouses of current and former military personnel, and schools or day care facilities attended by dependents of such personnel.

In order for the exemption to apply, the military personnel member must submit to the custodial agency a written request to exempt the information from public record requirements and a written statement

¹² See s. 119.071(4)(d)2., F.S.

¹³ S. 119.071(5)(i), F.S.

¹⁴ S. 119.071(5)(i)2.a., F.S.

¹⁵ S. 119.071(5)(i)2.b., F.S.

¹⁶ Formerly s. 119.071(5)(k), F.S.

¹⁷ The bill defines “special operations force” to mean those active and reserve component forces of the military services designated by the Secretary of Defense and specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct and support special operations. The term includes, but is not limited to, servicemembers of the U.S. Army Special Forces and the U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment; the U.S. Navy SEALs and Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen; the U.S. Air Force Combat Control, Pararescue, and Tactical Air Control Party specialists; the U.S. Marine Corps Critical Skills Operators; and any other component of the U.S. Special Operations Command approved by the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission. See ss. 943.10(5) and (22), F.S.

¹⁸ There is a difference between records the Legislature designates *exempt* from public record 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. Sch. Bd. of Seminole*, 874 So.2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004), *review denied*, 892 So.2d 1015 (Fla. 2004); *State v. Wooten*, 260 So.3d 1060, 1070 (Fla. 4th DCA 2018); *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. 04- 09 (2004).

that he or she has made reasonable efforts to protect the identification and location information from being accessible through other means available to the public.

The bill provides the constitutionally required public necessity statement,¹⁹ which provides, in part, that the public record exemption is necessary because disclosure of such records jeopardizes the safety of such military personnel, their spouses, and dependents. Pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act, the bill provides that the exemption will repeal on October 2, 2029, unless reenacted by the Legislature.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill could create a negative, but likely insignificant, fiscal impact on state and local agencies as staff for those entities could require training related to the public record exemption. It is unclear whether the staff will experience an increase in workload due to the number of military personnel who may take advantage of the public record exemption. The costs should be absorbed as they are part of the day-to-day responsibilities of the agency.

¹⁹ Article I, s. 24(c), Fla. Const., requires each public record exemption to “state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption.”