



## FULL ANALYSIS

### I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

#### A. HOUSE PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS:

Safeguard Individual Liberty- The bill allows a consumer to protect his or her personal information by placing a security freeze on his or her credit report and to remove, temporarily lift, or allow a specific third party access to their personal credit information at his or her discretion.

#### B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

##### **Current Situation**

##### **Fraud Alert**

The federal Fair Credit Reporting Act<sup>1</sup> (FCRA) provides two different types of fraud alerts that consumers may use to protect themselves against identity theft. Fraud alerts are designed to protect a consumer's private credit information if he or she suspects someone is attempting to open credit accounts in the consumer's name. When a business sees the alert on a consumer's credit report, the business must verify the consumer's identity before issuing credit. As part of the verification process, the business may try to contact the consumer directly.

A one-call fraud alert allows a consumer, or an individual acting on behalf of a consumer, who asserts in good faith that the consumer has been or is about to become a victim of fraud or related crime, including identity theft, to request that a consumer reporting agency include a fraud alert on the file of that consumer and also provide that alert along with any credit score generated with that file for a period of 90 days unless the consumer requests that the alert be removed before the end of that time period. The consumer reporting agency must also refer the information regarding the fraud alert to each of the other consumer reporting agencies as described in current law.

An extended alert is provided for a consumer wishing to place an alert on his or her file for a period of up to seven years unless the consumer wishes to remove the alert before the end of that time period. During the first five years of an extended fraud alert, a consumer reporting agency must exclude the consumer from any list of consumers prepared by a consumer reporting agency and provided to any third party to offer credit or insurance to the consumer as part of a transaction not initiated by the consumer. A consumer may request that the exclusion be rescinded before the end of the five year time period. The consumer reporting agency must also refer the information regarding the extended fraud alert to each of the other consumer reporting agencies as described in current law.

The FCRA requires that in any case where a consumer reporting agency includes a fraud alert in the file of a consumer, the consumer credit reporting agency must disclose to the consumer that he or she may request two free copies of the file on the consumer during the 12 month period beginning on the date in which the fraud alert was included in the file.

Fraud alerts do not prevent a credit report from being issued.

##### **Blocking Information Resulting from Identity Theft**

The FCRA provides that a consumer credit reporting agency must block the reporting of any information in the file of a consumer that the consumer identifies as information that resulted from an alleged identity theft, no later than 4 business days after the receipt by such agency of: appropriate proof of the identity of the consumer; a copy of an identity theft report; the identification of such

---

<sup>1</sup> 15 U.S.C. ss. 1681 et seq.

information by the consumer; and a statement by the consumer that the information is not related to any transaction by the consumer.

A consumer credit reporting agency is to promptly notify the furnisher of any information that has been identified as information resulting from an alleged identity theft that the information may be the result of identity theft; that an identity theft report has been filed; that a block has been requested; and the effective dates of the block.

A consumer credit reporting agency may decline to block or rescind any block if the consumer credit reporting agency reasonably determines that: the information was blocked in error; a block was requested by the consumer on the basis of material misrepresentation of fact by the consumer relevant to the request to block; or the consumer obtained possession of goods, services, or money as a result of the blocked transaction or transactions.

### **States Offering a Security Freeze**

Currently, California, Texas, Louisiana, Vermont, Washington, Nevada, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, and Colorado offer consumers the right to freeze their credit reports. Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Illinois only offer the option to those consumers affected by identity theft. Florida does not provide for any freeze or block on consumer credit information.

This bill is drawn from language contained in California's and New Jersey's legislation.

### **Proposed Changes**

The bill allows a consumer to place a "security freeze" on his or her credit report by making a request in writing by certified mail to a consumer credit reporting agency. The security freeze prohibits the consumer credit reporting agency from releasing the consumer's credit report or any information contained within the report without the authorized consent of the consumer. The security freeze lasts until the consumer requests that it be removed. The bill does not prohibit a consumer credit reporting agency from informing a third party that a particular consumer credit report has been placed under a security freeze.

The bill requires a consumer credit reporting agency to place a security freeze on a consumer's credit report no later than five business days after receiving the written request and requires the consumer credit reporting agency to send a written confirmation of the security freeze to the consumer within 10 business days of instituting the security freeze. A consumer credit reporting agency must remove the security freeze within three days of notification from the consumer. The bill requires the consumer credit reporting agency to provide the consumer with a personal identification number or password to be used by the consumer in the case where a consumer may wish to authorize a specific party access to his or her credit information at any point during the security freeze.

If the consumer wishes to allow a specific party to access his or her credit information during a security freeze, he or she must contact the consumer credit reporting agency, request that the freeze be temporarily lifted, and provide: proper identification as determined by the consumer credit reporting agency; the personal identification number or password previously provided to the consumer by the consumer credit reporting agency; and the proper information regarding the third party who is to receive the credit report, or the period of time for which the report shall be made temporarily available to those authorized to access the credit report.

The bill requires a consumer credit reporting agency to lift the security freeze within three days of receiving a written request from a consumer to temporarily lift the security freeze and allows a consumer credit reporting agency to develop procedures involving the use of telephone, fax, the internet, or other electronic media to receive and process a request from a consumer to temporarily lift a freeze on a credit report.

The bill allows a third party requesting access to a consumer credit report to treat the application as incomplete if the consumer has not authorized a temporary lifting of the security freeze specifically for the third party requesting access or for the period of time in which the request is made.

## **Exemptions**

The bill provides the following exemptions for use of a credit report by certain entities regardless of a security freeze being placed on a consumer's credit report:

- Any person, entity, or assignee of a financial obligation owed by a consumer to the person or entity under certain circumstances;
- A subsidiary, affiliate, agent, assignee, or prospective assignee of a person to whom access has been granted for purposes of facilitating the extension of credit or other permissible use;
- Any state or local agency, law enforcement agency, trial court, or private collection agency acting pursuant to a court order, warrant, or subpoena;
- A child support agency acting pursuant to Title IV-D of the Social Security Act;
- The Florida Department of Health or its agents or assigns acting to investigate Medicaid fraud;
- The Department of Financial Services or its agents or assigns acting to investigate or collect delinquent taxes or unpaid court orders or to fulfill any of its other statutory responsibilities;
- The use of credit information for the purposes of prescreening as provided for by the FCRA.

In addition, check services companies and demand deposit account information services companies are not required to place a freeze on a consumer's credit report. Resellers of consumer credit information are also exempt, however they must honor a security freeze placed on a consumer credit report.

## **Fees**

The bill allows a consumer credit reporting agency to charge a fee when a consumer elects to place, temporarily lift, or remove a security freeze on his or her credit report. The bill disallows a consumer credit reporting agency to charge a fee to a victim of identity theft. There is no cap on the amount of the fee.

## **Consumer Information**

The bill does not allow a consumer credit reporting agency to change a consumer's official information in a credit report when a security freeze is in effect without sending a written confirmation of the change to the consumer within 30 days of making the change. "Official information" includes the consumer's name, address, date of birth, and social security number. In the case of an address change, the bill requires the written confirmation to be sent to the new address and the former address of the consumer.

The bill provides that a written confirmation is not required for technical modifications to a consumer's official information including name and street abbreviations, complete spellings, or transposition of numbers or letters.

## **Cause of Action**

The bill creates a new cause of action for any person who is aggrieved by violations of the provisions of the bill for the recovery of actual and consequential damages, court costs, and attorney's fees.

## **Disclosure**

The bill requires a consumer credit reporting agency to include a written summary of all rights under the bill to a consumer when sending the consumer a written disclosure. The bill details the information that

must be included in the written summary of consumer rights, including the right to civil action. Consumer credit reporting agencies which maintain consumer credit reports on a nationwide basis must provide a toll free telephone number for the consumer to use if he or she wishes to communicate with the consumer credit reporting agency.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Creates s. 501.005, F.S., authorizing and providing the procedures for a consumer to place a security freeze on his or her credit report. Provides definitions pertaining to a credit report security freeze. Provides procedures for temporary suspension and removal of a security freeze on a credit report. Provides procedures to allow temporary access to a credit report under a security freeze. Authorizes credit reporting agencies to charge a fee to initiate, temporarily lift, or remove a security freeze and disallows such fees for victims of identity theft. Provides exemptions for certain entities. Provides civil remedy. Provides requirements for written disclosure.

Section 2. Provides that the act will take effect on July 1, 2006.

## 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:

The bill allows consumer credit reporting agencies to charge a reasonable fee any time a consumer chooses to place, temporarily lift, or remove a freeze from his or her credit report.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

## III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to spend funds or to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds. This bill does not reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with counties or municipalities. This bill does not reduce the authority that municipalities have to raise revenues.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

Page 6, lines 152 and 154 refer to the Department of Health with respect to Medicaid fraud investigations and the Department of Financial Services with respect to recovery of delinquent taxes. The Agency for Health Care Administration is responsible for investigating Medicaid fraud and the Department of Revenue is responsible for collecting delinquent taxes.

#### **IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE & COMBINED BILL CHANGES**

N/A