

**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.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Health Regulation Committee

BILL: SB 972

INTRODUCER: Senator Richter

SUBJECT: Public Records - Dental Workforce Surveys

DATE: March 7, 2010

REVISED: 03/10/10

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Stovall	Wilson	HR	<b>Fav/1 amendment</b>
2.			GO	
3.			HA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

**Please see Section VIII. for Additional Information:**

- A. COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE.....  Statement of Substantial Changes  
 B. AMENDMENTS.....  Technical amendments were recommended  
 Amendments were recommended  
 Significant amendments were recommended

**I. Summary:**

The bill makes information which identifies a dentist or dental hygienist who responds to the Department of Health (DOH) dental workforce surveys required by SB 970 confidential and exempt from the public records law and the constitutional provision related to public records. The bill provides a statement of the public necessity for the public records exemption.

This bill creates three undesignated sections of law.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Public Records**

The State of Florida has a long history of providing public access to governmental records. The Florida Legislature enacted the first public records law in 1892.<sup>1</sup> One-hundred years later, Floridians adopted an amendment to the State Constitution that raised the statutory right of access to public records to a constitutional level.<sup>2</sup> Article I, s. 24 of the State Constitution, provides that:

<sup>1</sup> Section 1390, 1391 F.S. (Rev. 1892).

<sup>2</sup> Article I, s. 24 of the State Constitution.

(a) Every person has the right to inspect or copy any public record made or received in connection with the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, or persons acting on their behalf, except with respect to records exempted pursuant to this section or specifically made confidential by this Constitution. This section specifically includes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government and each agency or department created thereunder; counties, municipalities, and districts; and each constitutional officer, board, and commission, or entity created pursuant to law or this Constitution.

In addition to the State Constitution, the Public Records Act,<sup>3</sup> which pre-dates the State Constitution's public records provisions, specifies conditions under which public access must be provided to records of an agency.<sup>4</sup> Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S., states:

Every person who has custody of a public record shall permit the record to be inspected and copied by any person desiring to do so, at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public records.

Unless specifically exempted, all agency records are available for public inspection. The term "public record" is broadly defined 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>5</sup>

The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted this definition to encompass all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are used to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge.<sup>6</sup> All such materials, regardless of whether they are in final form, are open for public inspection unless made exempt.<sup>7</sup>

Only the Legislature is authorized to create exemptions to open government requirements.<sup>8</sup> Exemptions must be created by general law, and such law must specifically state the public

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 119, F.S.

<sup>4</sup> The word "agency" is defined in s. 119.011(2), F.S., to mean "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." The Florida Constitution also establishes a right of access to any public record made or received in connection with the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, or persons acting on their behalf, except those records exempted by law or the State Constitution.

<sup>5</sup> Section 119.011(12), F.S.

<sup>6</sup> *Shevin v. Byron, Harless, Schaffer, Reid and Associates, Inc.*, 379 So. 2d 633, 640 (Fla. 1980).

<sup>7</sup> *Wait v. Florida Power & Light Company*, 372 So. 2d 420 (Fla. 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution.

necessity justifying the exemption. Further, the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law.<sup>9</sup> A bill enacting an exemption<sup>10</sup> may not contain other substantive provisions, although it may contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.<sup>11</sup>

There is a difference between records that the Legislature has made exempt from public inspection and those that are *confidential* and exempt. If the Legislature makes a record confidential and exempt, such information may not be released by an agency to anyone other than to the persons or entities designated in the statute.<sup>12</sup> If a record is simply made exempt from disclosure requirements, an agency is not prohibited from disclosing the record in all circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

The Open Government Sunset Review Act (Act)<sup>14</sup> provides for the systematic review, through a 5-year cycle ending October 2nd of the 5th year following enactment, of an exemption from the Public Records Act or the Public Meetings Law.

### Criteria for Exemption

The Act states that an exemption may be created, revised or expanded only if it serves an identifiable public purpose and if the exemption is no broader than necessary to meet the public purpose it serves. An identifiable public purpose is served if the exemption meets one of three specified criteria and if 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. An exemption meets the three statutory criteria if it:

- 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 information of a sensitive personal nature concerning individuals, the release of which would be defamatory or cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of such individuals, or would jeopardize their safety; or
- Protects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, including, but not limited to, a formula, pattern, device, combination of devices, or compilation of information that is used to protect or further a business advantage over those who do not know or use it, the disclosure of which would injure the affected entity in the marketplace.<sup>15</sup>

The Act also requires consideration of the following:

- 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?

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<sup>9</sup> *Memorial Hospital-West Volusia v. News-Journal Corporation*, 729 So. 2d 373, 380 (Fla. 1999); *Halifax Hospital Medical Center v. News-Journal Corporation*, 724 So. 2d 567, 569 (Fla. 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Under s. 119.15, F.S., an existing exemption may be considered a new exemption if the exemption is expanded to cover additional records.

<sup>11</sup> Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution.

<sup>12</sup> Florida Attorney General Opinion 85-62.

<sup>13</sup> *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So. 2d 683, 687 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA 1991), *review denied*, 589 So. 2d 289 (Fla. 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Section 119.15, F.S.

<sup>15</sup> Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

- 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?

While the standards in the Open Government Sunset Review Act may appear to limit the Legislature in the exemption review process, those aspects of the act that are only statutory, as opposed to constitutional, do not limit the Legislature because one session of the Legislature cannot bind another.<sup>16</sup> The Legislature is only limited in its review process by constitutional requirements.

Further, s. 119.15(8), F.S., makes explicit that:

notwithstanding s. 768.28 or any other law, neither the state or its political subdivisions nor any other public body shall be made party to any suit in any court or incur any liability for the repeal or revival and reenactment of an exemption under this section. The failure of the Legislature to comply strictly with this section does not invalidate an otherwise valid reenactment.

### **Unauthorized Disclosure**

Under s. 119.10(1)(a), F.S., any public officer who violates any provision of the Public Records Act is guilty of a noncriminal infraction, punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500. Further, under paragraph (b) of that subsection, a public officer who knowingly violates the provisions of s. 119.07(1), F.S., relating to the right to inspect public records, commits a first-degree misdemeanor, and is subject to suspension and removal from office or impeachment. Any person who willfully and knowingly violates any provision of the chapter is guilty of a first-degree misdemeanor, punishable by potential imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding \$1,000.

### **Workforce Surveys**

Senate Bill 970 requires all Florida licensed dentists and dental hygienists to complete a workforce survey as a part of their licensure renewal, beginning in 2012. The bill provides that licensure renewal in 2012 is not contingent upon the completion and submission of the dental workforce survey, however the Board may not renew the license of any dentist or dental hygienist for subsequent renewals until the survey is completed and submitted by the licensee.

Medical physicians and osteopathic physicians are required to respond to physician workforce surveys required as a condition of license renewal.<sup>17</sup> All personal identifying information contained in records provided by physicians in response to these physician workforce surveys are confidential and exempt under s. 458.3193, F.S.

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<sup>16</sup> *Straughn v. Camp*, 293 So.2d 689, 694 (Fla. 1974).

<sup>17</sup> s. 381.4018, F.S.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1.** Creates an undesignated section of law to provide that information which identifies a dentist or dental hygienist who responds to dental workforce surveys that are mandated as a part of licensure renewal by SB 970 is confidential and exempt. The bill authorizes disclosure of such information with the written consent of the individual to whom the information pertains; by court order; or to a research entity, if the entity seeks the records or data pursuant to a research protocol approved by the DOH.

The bill provides that the amendments made by this act are subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act in accordance with s. 119.15, F.S., and provides that the public-records exemptions will stand repealed on October 2, 2015, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

**Section 2.** Creates an undesignated section of law providing justification of public necessity for the exemption. Responding to the dental workforce survey is a condition of licensure renewal for dentists and dental hygienists licensed in Florida. Candid and honest responses to the workforce survey will ensure that timely and accurate information is available to the DOH. The failure to maintain the confidentiality of the personal identifying information would prevent the resolution of important state interests to ensure the availability of dentists or dental hygienists in this state.

**Section 3.** Provides that this public records exemption takes effect on the same date that its linked bill takes effect however the bill number is not provided. That bill is SB 970. (See the comment under technical deficiencies below.) SB 970 is to take effect on July 1, 2010.

### IV. Constitutional Issues:

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

The provisions of this bill have no impact on municipalities and the counties under the requirements of Article VII, Section 18 of the Florida Constitution.

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

The provisions of this bill conform to the public records requirements of Article I, Section 24(a) and (b) of the Florida Constitution as discussed in the analysis.

#### C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

The provisions of this bill have no impact on the trust fund restrictions under the requirements of Article III, Subsection 19(f) of the Florida Constitution.

### V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

#### A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

This bill will protect personal identifying information of dentists and dental hygienists who respond to the dental workforce survey, which is a requirement of licensure renewal.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The DOH and the Board will need to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to prevent the release of the personal identifying information except under the limited situations excepted in the bill.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

Line 62 needs to be amended to provide that Senate Bill 970 is the linked bill to this public records exemption bill.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Additional Information:****A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

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

None.

**B. Amendments:****Barcode 284946 by Health Regulation on March 19, 2010**

Inserts the number of the companion bill – SB 970 – into the contingent effective date.