

**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: SB 7038

INTRODUCER: Agriculture Committee

SUBJECT: OGSR/Division of Fruit and Vegetables/Trade Secrets

DATE: March 29, 2021

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
	<u>Becker</u>	<u>Becker</u>		<b>AG Submitted as Committee Bill</b>
1.	<u>McVaney</u>	<u>McVaney</u>	<u>GO</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	_____	_____	<u>RC</u>	_____

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**I. Summary:**

SB 7038 saves from repeal the public records exemption for trade secrets held by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Fruit and Vegetables under s. 570.48(3), F.S.

The public records exemption stands repealed on October 2, 2021, unless it is reenacted by the Legislature under the Open Government Sunset Review Act. The bill removes the scheduled repeal of the exemption to continue the confidential and exempt status of the information.

The bill is not expected to impact state and local revenues and expenditures.

The bill takes effect October 1, 2021.

**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

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

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

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 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>

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<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*, (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).

<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).

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>

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

<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., provide 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.

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

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

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

In examining an exemption, the act directs the Legislature to carefully question the purpose and necessity of reenacting the exemption. The act requires the Legislature to consider the following specific questions in such a review:<sup>24</sup>

- 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?

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>

## **Trade Secrets Public Records Exemptions**

### ***Criminal Prohibition***

Section 812.081(2), F.S., prohibits the intentional misappropriation of a trade secret from its owner, including stealing or embezzling an article representing a trade secret or without authority making or causing to be made a copy of an article representing a trade secret. A violation is a felony of the third degree.<sup>27</sup>

Section 812.081(1)(c), F.S., defines a “trade secret” to mean:

...the whole or any portion or phase of any formula, pattern, device, combination of devices, or compilation of information which is for use, or is used, in the operation of a business and which provides the business an advantage, or an opportunity to obtain an advantage, over those who do not know or use it. The term includes any scientific, technical, or commercial information, including financial information, and includes any design, process, procedure, list of suppliers, list of customers, business code, or improvement thereof. Irrespective of novelty, invention, patentability, the state of the prior art, and the level of skill in the business, art, or field to which the subject matter pertains, a trade secret is considered to be:

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

<sup>24</sup> Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S.

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

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

<sup>27</sup> Section 775.082, F.S., provides that a felony of the third degree is punishable by a term of imprisonment not to exceed five years. Section 775.083, F.S., provides that a felony of the third degree is punishable by a fine not to exceed \$5,000.

1. Secret;
2. Of value;
3. For use or in use by the business; and
4. Of advantage to the business, or providing an opportunity to obtain an advantage, over those who do not know or use it

when the owner thereof takes measures to prevent it from becoming available to persons other than those selected by the owner to have access thereto for limited purposes.

The following sections of the Florida Statutes exempt from public disclosure trade secrets, as defined by s. 812.081(1)(c), F.S.:

- Section 125.0104(9)(d), F.S., exempts trade secrets held by a county tourism promotion agency.
- Section 288.1226(8), F.S., exempts trade secrets relating to projects conducted by the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation (Visit Florida).
- Section 331.326, F.S., makes trade secrets held by Space Florida confidential and exempt; makes portions of meetings in which trade secrets are discussed exempt from open meetings requirements; recordings of closed meetings are confidential and exempt.<sup>28</sup>
- Section 365.174, F.S., makes trade secret business information submitted to the E911 Board or the Technology Program under Department of Management Services confidential and exempt.
- Section 381.83, F.S., makes trade secret information obtained by the Department of Health confidential and exempt.
- Sections 403.7046(2) and (3)(b) and 403.73, F.S., make trade secret information reported to the Department of Environmental Protection pursuant to specified regulations confidential and exempt.
- Section 499.012(8)(g) and (m), F.S., provides that trade secret information provided to the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) in a prescription drug permit application is confidential and exempt pursuant to its inspection authority under s. 499.051, F.S.
- Section 499.0121(7), F.S., provides that trade secret information reported to DBPR in a list of prescription drug wholesalers is confidential and exempt pursuant to its inspection authority under s. 499.051, F.S.
- Section 499.051(7), F.S., makes trade secret information contained in a complaint and obtained by DBPR during an investigation of a permit holder under the Florida Drug and Cosmetic Act confidential and exempt.
- Section 499.931, F.S., makes trade secrets related to the regulation of medical gases that are submitted to DBPR by an applicant or permit holder confidential and exempt.
- Section 502.222, F.S., makes trade secret information of a dairy industry business held by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) confidential and exempt.

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<sup>28</sup> Records designated as exempt from public record requirements by the Legislature are distinct from those deemed confidential and exempt. Exempt records may be disclosed under certain circumstances. *See WFTV, Inc. v. The School Board of Seminole*, 874 So. 2d 48, 53 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA 2004), *review denied* 892 So. 2d 1015 (Fla. 2004); *City of Riviera Beach v. Barfield*, 642 So. 2d 1135 (Fla. 4<sup>th</sup> DCA 1994); *Williams v. City of Minneola*, 575 So. 2d 687 (Fla. 5<sup>th</sup> DCA 1991). Confidential and exempt records 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. 85-62* (1985).

- Section 570.48(3), F.S., makes records containing trade secrets held by DACS Division of Fruit and Vegetables confidential and exempt.
- Section 573.123(2), F.S., makes records containing trade secrets provided to DACS by specified persons under a marking order confidential and exempt.
- Section 601.10(8)(a), F.S., makes any information held by the Department of Citrus that contains trade secrets confidential and exempt.
- Section 601.15(7)(d), F.S., makes trade secret information that is provided by noncommodity advertising and promotional program participants to Department of Citrus confidential and exempt.
- Section 601.152(8)(c), F.S., makes trade secret information provided by citrus handlers to Department of Citrus confidential and exempt.
- Section 601.76, F.S., makes formulas containing trade secrets that are submitted to DACS confidential and exempt.
- Section 815.04(3), F.S., makes data, programs, and supporting documentation held by an agency and that exists internal or external to a computer, computer system, computer network, or electronic device confidential and exempt.

### ***Uniform Trade Secrets Act***

Florida's Uniform Trade Secrets Act in ch. 688, F.S., provides a separate civil process for the protection of trade secrets, including injunctive relief to preserve a trade secret,<sup>29</sup> and the right to recover damages for the misappropriation of a trade secret.<sup>30</sup> Chapter 688, F.S., does not provide criminal prohibitions or penalties to preserve trade secrets. The trade secret protections in ch. 688, F.S., are for civil remedies by private persons seeking to preserve a trade secret.<sup>31</sup>

Section 688.002(4), F.S., defines the term "trade secret" to mean:

...information, including a formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process that:

- (a) Derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use; and
- (b) Is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy.

The definition in s. 812.081(1)(c), F.S., may be considered a broader definition than that provided in s. 688.002(4), F.S. For example, the definition of "trade secret" in s. 812.081(1)(c), F.S., expressly includes financial information and that the subject of the trade secret be of advantage to the business, or provide an opportunity to obtain an advantage, over those who do not know or use it. Section 688.002(4), F.S., does not explicitly reference financial information or reference the issue business advantage. The definition in s. 688.002(4), F.S., may also be interpreted as less clear. For example, s. 688.002(4), F.S., requires that the information has

<sup>29</sup> Section 688.003, F.S.

<sup>30</sup> Section 688.004, F.S. Federal law provides comparable remedy for the preservation of trade secrets under 18 U.S.C. § 1831, *et seq.*

<sup>31</sup> *See* s. 688.008, F.S.

“independent economic value,” rather than just be “of value,” as required under s. 812.081(1)(c), F.S.

### ***Protection of a Trade Secret by its Owner***

The trade secret owner must label a trade secret as such or specify in writing upon delivery to a state agency that the information provided to the agency is a trade secret in order for the information to be considered confidential and exempt under the public records law.<sup>32</sup> In *Sepro v. Department of Environmental Protection*, the court held that information provided to the agency by the appellant was subject to disclosure because the appellant had failed to actively protect the information or label information as a trade secret.<sup>33</sup>

### **Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Fruit and Vegetables**

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (department) Division of Fruit and Vegetables (division) inspects and certifies all fresh shipments of vegetables, fruit, and nuts covered by state and federal marketing orders.<sup>34</sup>

The duties of the division include, but are not limited to:

- Performing duties relating to the inspection and certification of fresh citrus fruit shipments for maturity and grade required by rules promulgated under the Florida Citrus Code;
- Performing the inspection and certification duties assigned in connection with regulations issued under federal or state marketing agreements or orders; and
- Performing the other inspection and certification assignments requested by and agreed upon with the applicant.<sup>35</sup>

### **Marketing Orders and Agreements**

Marketing agreements and orders are initiated by industry to help provide stable markets for dairy products, fruits, vegetables and specialty crops. Each order and agreement is tailored to the individual industry’s needs. Marketing Orders are a binding regulation for the entire industry in the specified geographical area, once it is approved by the producers and the Secretary of Agriculture. Marketing Agreements are only binding for those handlers that sign the agreement.<sup>36</sup>

### **Public Records Exemption for the Division of Fruit and Vegetables**

The Legislature enacted a public records exemption for the division to include information which would separately disclose the business transactions of any person, trade secrets, names of customers, plant production, or other individual commercial information. The records of the division are public records; however, trade secrets as defined in s. 812.081, F.S., are confidential and exempt from s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution.

The exemption should not be construed to prohibit:

<sup>32</sup> *Sepro v. Department of Environmental Protection*, 839 So. 2d 781 (Fla. 1st DCA 2003).

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> See <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Fruit-and-Vegetables>, (last visited March 3, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> S. 570.48(1), F.S.

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/moa> (last visited March 3, 2021).

- A disclosure necessary to enforcement procedures;
- The department from releasing information to other governmental agencies. Other governmental agencies that receive confidential information from the department under this subsection shall maintain the confidentiality of that information; and
- The department or other agencies from compiling and publishing appropriate data regarding procedures, yield, recovery, quality, and related matters, provided such released data do not reveal by whom the activity to which the data relate was conducted.

### **Open Government Sunset Review Findings and Recommendations**

In February 2021, the Professional Staff of the Senate Committee on Agriculture sent an Open Government Sunset Review Questionnaire to the department. The department reported that it rarely receives a public record request for the information exempt under s. 570.48(3), F.S., as the exemption is well known within the industry and producers rely on it to protect their trade secret information provided to the department during its regulatory inspections.<sup>37</sup>

The department recommended that the exemption in s 570.48(3), F.S., should be reenacted.<sup>38</sup>

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

SB 7036 amends s. 570.48(3), F.S., to remove the scheduled repeal of a public records exemption for records of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Fruit and Vegetables that are considered trade secrets as defined in s. 119.07(1), F.S., and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution.

The public records exemption would stand repealed on October 2, 2021, unless it is reenacted by the Legislature under the Open Government Sunset Review Act.

The bill takes effect October 1, 2021.

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

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

Not applicable. The bill does not require counties or municipalities to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds, reduce the authority that counties or municipalities have to raise revenue in the aggregate, nor reduce the percentage of state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

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<sup>37</sup> See *Open Government Sunset Review Questionnaire* response from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on file with the Senate Committee on Agriculture.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*



**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 bill creating or expanding an exemption to the public records requirements. This bill does not create or expand an exemption, thus, the bill does not require a two-thirds vote to be enacted.

***Public Necessity Statement***

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires a bill creating or expanding an exemption to the public records requirements to state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption. This bill does not create or expand an exemption. Thus, a statement of public necessity is not required.

***Breadth of Exemption***

Article I, s. 24(c) of the State Constitution requires an exemption to the public records requirements to be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. The exemption in the bill does not appear to be broader than necessary to accomplish the purpose of the law.

**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:**

The private sector will continue to be subject to the cost, to the extent imposed, associated with the department making redactions and/or making copies in response to public records requests.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The department will continue to incur costs related to the redaction of exempt records and copying associated with responding to public records requests.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill substantially amends s. 570.48 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.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.