

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: CS/HB 699 Pub. Rec./Homelessness Counts and Databases

SPONSOR(S): Government Operations Subcommittee, McFarland and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 934

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 113 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Pending

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/HB 699 passed the House on March 7, 2022, as SB 934.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires local homeless continuums of care (CoCs) to submit annual point-in-time (PIT) counts of people experiencing homelessness. The CoCs collect the data necessary to generate a PIT count of people experiencing homelessness by requiring individuals who apply for assistance to provide certain individual identifying information, including the person's name, date of birth, and social security number. Collecting a person's individual identifying information is necessary to ensure PIT counts provide unduplicated counts of homeless individuals. Having an accurate PIT count allows for federal grants and assistance to be provided to those who need it the most.

The bill creates a public record exemption for individual identifying information contained in a PIT count or a homeless management information system that is collected pursuant to federal law.

The bill provides that the exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will repeal on October 2, 2027, unless reviewed and saved from repeal by the Legislature. The bill provides a statement of public necessity as required by the Florida Constitution.

The bill has no fiscal impact on state or local government.

Subject to the Governor's veto powers, the effective date of the bill is upon becoming a law.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Background

Public Records

Article I, s. 24(a) of the Florida Constitution sets forth the state's public policy regarding access to government records. This section guarantees every person a right to inspect or copy any public record of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The Legislature, however, may provide by general law for the exemption of records from the requirements of Article I, section 24(a).¹ The general law must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption and must be no more broad than necessary to accomplish its purpose.²

Public policy regarding access to government records is addressed further in the Florida Statutes. Section 119.07(1), F.S., guarantees every person a right to inspect and copy any state, county, or municipal record. Furthermore, the Open Government Sunset Review Act³ provides that a public record or public meeting exemption may be created or maintained only if it serves an identifiable public purpose. In addition, it may be no broader than is necessary to meet 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.⁴

The Open Government Sunset Review Act requires the automatic repeal of a newly-created exemption on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.⁵

Continuums of Care (CoC)

A CoC is a group of organizations that is responsible for coordinating, planning, and pursuing an end to homelessness in a designated catchment area.⁶ Florida has 27 CoCs of varying sizes and geographic areas.⁷ Each CoC is represented by a CoC lead agency.⁸ The lead agency is responsible for applying to HUD for federal grants and distributing grant funds to other CoCs and local homeless organizations in its catchment area.⁹

Federal Homelessness Grants

¹ Art. I, s. 24(c), FLA. CONST.

² *Id.*

³ Section 119.15, F.S.

⁴ Section 119.15(6)(b), F.S.

⁵ Section 119.15(3), F.S.

⁶ Section 420.621(1), F.S. CoCs can be composed of nonprofit homeless providers, victim service providers, faith-based organizations, governments, businesses, advocates, public housing agencies, school districts, social service providers, mental health agencies, hospitals, universities, affordable housing developers, law enforcement, organizations that serve homeless and formerly homeless veterans, and organizations that serve homeless and formerly homeless persons.

⁷ Department of Children and Families, *Continuums of Care and Local Providers of Service*, CoC Contact Table, available at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/homelessness/docs/CoC%20Contact%20Table.pdf> (last visited February 4, 2022).

⁸ Section 420.621(2), F.S.; see also s. 420.6225, F.S.

⁹ Section 420.6225(2), F.S.

In 2009, Congress enacted the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act.¹⁰ The HEARTH Act created two main federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which distribute federal homelessness grant funding: the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program and the Continuum of Care (CoC) program.¹¹ The ESG program distributes grant funds primarily for emergency sheltering of the homeless.¹² The CoC program distributes grant funds to assist with the longer-term housing and service needs of the homeless.¹³

Homeless Management Information Systems

To be eligible to receive federal grants, HUD requires a CoC to have a homeless management information system (HMIS) with the capacity to collect unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.¹⁴ CoCs use the information collected from serving homeless individuals and families to determine future needs and establish funding priorities.¹⁵

HUD also requires a CoC to report certain universal data elements into its HMIS.¹⁶ The universal data elements include personal identifying information that is necessary to produce an unduplicated estimate of the number of homeless people accessing services from homeless providers. The universal data elements include an individual's:

- Name;
- Social security number;
- Date of birth;
- Ethnicity and race;
- Gender;
- Veteran status;
- Disabling condition;
- Residence prior to program entry;
- Zip code of last permanent residence;
- Program entry date and exit date;
- Unique personal identification number;
- Program identification number; and
- Household identification number.¹⁷

HUD requires all homeless organizations that record or process personal protected information (PPI) of homeless individuals into a HMIS to comply with certain standards to protect the confidentiality of PPI,

¹⁰ Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-22, 111th Cong. (May 20, 2009).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Title II, Emergency Solutions Grant Program, § 1203(f), and Title III, Continuum of Care Program, § 423(a)(9); see also The HUD Exchange, *HMIS Requirements*, available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/hmis-requirements/> (last visited February 4, 2022).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *The Federal Register*, Vol. 69, No. 146, July 30, 2004, Notices, pg. 45901, available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2004-07-30/pdf/04-17097.pdf> (last visited February 4, 2022).

¹⁷ *Id.* at pg. 45905.

while allowing for reasonable, responsible, and limited use and disclosure of data.¹⁸ Specifically, HUD restricts the disclosure of personal identifying information to the following circumstances:

- To provide or coordinate services to an individual;
- To provide payment or reimbursement for services;
- To carry out administrative functions; and
- To create de-identified personal identifying information.¹⁹

In addition to meeting the confidentiality and security requirements above, HUD requires CoC lead agencies and their local CoCs and homeless organizations to develop and implement written procedures to ensure that the following information is kept secure and confidential for individuals who receive assistance under the ESG program or the CoC program:

- All records containing the PPI of any individual or family who applies for and/or receives assistance from the CoC program or the ESG program;
- The address or location of any domestic violence project assisted under the CoC program or the ESG program, except with written authorization of the person responsible for the project or shelter; and
- The address or location of any housing of a program participant, except as provided under a preexisting privacy policy of the recipient or subrecipient and consistent with State and local laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality.²⁰

Despite these protections, some local homeless organizations that comprise certain CoCs do not share information in a HMIS about individuals to whom they provide assistance because they don't want the individual's personal identifying information to become a public record as a result of Florida's public policy regarding access to government records. This leads to the potential for a homeless individual to receive duplicate funding from multiple homeless organizations.²¹

Point-in-Time Counts

HUD requires CoCs to annually conduct a point-in-time (PIT) count of people experiencing homelessness who are sheltered in an emergency shelter or transitional housing.²² CoCs use their HMIS to conduct the PIT count on a single day of the year to provide a snapshot of the number of homeless people who are sheltered.²³ The PIT count includes the universal data elements/personal identifying information detailed above (name, social security number, date of birth, etc.) to ensure the count is accurate and unduplicated.

CoCs are also required to biennially conduct a PIT count of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness.²⁴ This count is conducted by surveying homeless individuals in the community. The survey also includes personal identifying information.²⁵

Effect of the Bill

The bill creates a public record exemption for individual identifying information contained in a PIT count or a homeless management information system that is collected pursuant to federal law. Further, the bill provides that the public record exemption applies retroactively to individual identifying information

¹⁸ *Id.* at pgs. 45927 and 45928.

¹⁹ *Id.* at pg. 45928.

²⁰ 24 C.F.R. § 578.103(b), and 24 C.F.R. § 576.500(x).

²¹ Email from Chris Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness, RE: HB 699, (January 10, 2022).

²² The HUD Exchange, *Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count*, available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/> (last visited February 4, 2022).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ Sample surveys are available at <https://www.pointintime.info/simtechsolutions/assets/File/PIT%202018%20Unsheltered%20Survey.pdf> (last visited February 4, 2022).

collected in a PIT count or a homeless management information system prior to the effective date of the bill.

The bill also authorizes aggregate information from a PIT count or a homeless management information system to be released as long as it does not disclose an individual's identifying information.

The bill provides a public necessity statement as required by article I, section 24(c) of the Florida Constitution. The public necessity statement provides that public knowledge of identifying information of a homeless individual could lead to discrimination or ridicule of the individual which could make them reluctant to seek assistance. Public knowledge of such information may also create a greater risk of injury to affected individuals who are survivors of domestic violence or suffer from mental illness or substance abuse. Additionally, public knowledge of such information may create a heightened risk for fraud and identity theft to affected individuals. The harm from disclosing the individual identifying information of a person contained in a PIT count or in a homeless management information system outweighs any public benefit that can be derived from widespread and unfettered access to such information.

The bill further provides that the exemption is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and will be repealed on October 2, 2027, unless the Legislature reviews and renews the exemption before that date.

The bill is effective upon becoming a law.

The bill requires the Division of Law Revision to replace the phrase "the effective date of this act" wherever it occurs with the date the bill becomes law.

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:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.