

House Bill No. 1083

An act relating to public records; providing an exemption from the public records law for photographs and video and audio recordings of an autopsy; providing an exemption for certain members of the immediate family, or a representative thereof, or a state or federal agency; prohibiting the custodian of a photograph or video or audio recording of an autopsy from permitting any person to view or duplicate a photograph or video or audio, except pursuant to court order and under the direct supervision of the custodian or his or her designee; exempting criminal and administrative proceedings from the act; requiring certain persons to be parties in a request for access to a photograph or video or audio recording of an autopsy; providing penalties; providing for future legislative review and repeal; providing a finding of public necessity; providing a retroactive effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. (1) A photograph or video or audio recording of an autopsy in the custody of a medical examiner is confidential and exempt from the requirements of section 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution, except that a surviving spouse may view and copy a photograph or video or listen to or copy an audio recording of the deceased spouse's autopsy. If there is no surviving spouse, then the surviving parents shall have access to such records. If there is no surviving spouse or parent, then an adult child shall have access to such records. A local governmental entity, or a state or federal agency, in furtherance of its official duties, pursuant to a written request, may view or copy a photograph or video or may listen to or copy an audio recording of an autopsy, and unless otherwise required in the performance of their duties, the identity of the deceased shall remain confidential and exempt. The custodian of the record, or his or her designee, may not permit any other person to view or copy such photograph or video recording or listen to or copy an audio recording without a court order. For the purposes of this section, the term "medical examiner" means any district medical examiner, associate medical examiner, or substitute medical examiner acting pursuant to ch. 406, as well as any employee, deputy, or agent of a medical examiner or any other person who may obtain possession of a photograph or audio or video recording of an autopsy in the course of assisting a medical examiner in the performance of his or her official duties.

(2)(a) The court, upon a showing of good cause, may issue an order authorizing any person to view or copy a photograph or video recording of an autopsy or to listen to or copy an audio recording of an autopsy and may prescribe any restrictions or stipulations that the court deems appropriate.

In determining good cause, the court shall consider whether such disclosure is necessary for the public evaluation of governmental performance; the seriousness of the intrusion into the family's right to privacy and whether

such disclosure is the least intrusive means available; and the availability of similar information in other public records, regardless of form. In all cases, the viewing, copying, listening to or other handling of a photograph or video or audio recording of an autopsy must be under the direct supervision of the custodian of the record or his or her designee.

(2)(b) A surviving spouse shall be given reasonable notice of a petition filed with the court to view or copy a photograph or video recording of an autopsy or a petition to listen to or copy an audio recording, a copy of such petition, and reasonable notice of the opportunity to be present and heard at any hearing on the matter. If there is no surviving spouse, then such notice must be given to the deceased's parents, and if the deceased has no living parent, then to the adult children of the deceased.

(3)(a) Any custodian of a photograph or video or audio recording of an autopsy who willfully and knowingly violates this section commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in section 775.082, section 775.083, or section 775.084, Florida Statutes.

(b) Any person who willfully and knowingly violates a court order issued pursuant to this section commits a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in section 775.082, section 775.083, or section 775.084, Florida Statutes.

(c) A criminal or administrative proceeding is exempt from this section, but unless otherwise exempted, is subject to all other provisions of Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, provided however that this section does not prohibit a court in a criminal or administrative proceeding upon good cause shown from restricting or otherwise controlling the disclosure of an autopsy, crime-scene, or similar photograph or video or audio recordings in the manner prescribed herein.

(4) This exemption shall be given retroactive application.

(5) The exemption in this section is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act of 1995 in accordance with section 119.15, Florida Statutes, and shall stand repealed on October 2, 2006, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.

Section 2. The Legislature finds that it is a public necessity that photographs and video and audio recordings of an autopsy be made confidential and exempt from the requirements of section 119.07(1), Florida Statutes, and Section 24(a) of Article I of the State Constitution. The Legislature finds that photographs or video or audio recordings of an autopsy depict or describe the deceased in graphic and often disturbing fashion. Such photographs or video or audio recordings may depict or describe the deceased nude, bruised, bloodied, broken, with bullet or other wounds, cut open, dismembered, or decapitated. As such, photographs or video or audio recordings of an autopsy are highly sensitive depictions or descriptions of the deceased which, if heard, viewed, copied or publicized, could result in trauma, sorrow, humiliation, or emotional injury to the immediate family of the deceased, as well as injury to the memory of the deceased. The Legislature notes that the existence of the World Wide Web and the proliferation

of personal computers throughout the world encourages and promotes the wide dissemination of photographs and video and audio recordings 24 hours a day and that widespread unauthorized dissemination of autopsy photographs and video and audio recordings would subject the immediate family of the deceased to continuous injury. The Legislature further notes that there continue to be other types of available information, such as the autopsy report, which are less intrusive and injurious to the immediate family members of the deceased and which continue to provide for public oversight. The Legislature further finds that the exemption provided in this act should be given retroactive application because it is remedial in nature.

Section 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, and shall apply to all photographs or video or audio recordings of an autopsy, regardless of whether the autopsy was performed before or after the effective date of the act.

Approved by the Governor March 29, 2001.

Filed in Office Secretary of State March 29, 2001.