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21 February 2017

The Honorable Bob Rommel
The Florida House of Representatives
402 South Monroe Street, Room 1401 The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: HB 351 Exemption/Postsecondary Education Executive Searches

Dear Representative Rommel:

Thanks so much for taking the time to meet with me on your bill HB 351. last week. I have discussed the proposed exemption with my legislative committee and unfortunately, the committee does not see any possibility for narrowing the exemption as we discussed.

It is our position that HB 351 is contrary to the public interest and respectfully suggest it be withdrawn from further consideration.

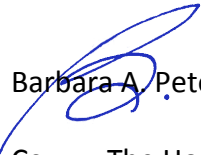
According to the statement of public necessity, the exemptions for information identifying candidates for the position of president, provost, or dean of state universities and colleges, and certain meetings related to such candidates are needed because most applicants are employed at the time of application and may fear losing their current position; as a result, the pool of qualified applicants may be diminished. In reality, Florida's universities have had great success in hiring university and college presidents in the Sunshine. University of Florida's W. Kent Fuchs and Dr. John C. Hitt from the University of Central Florida, are model examples—and both were employed by other universities at the time of their application. We can cite numerous other examples, but the point is clear: The justification for this exemption is speculative at best, and is not supported by the facts. In fact, it presumes that our current – and former -- presidents, provosts, and deans are not the best they could be.

It is our position that the proposed exemption is detrimental in many ways—shielding individuals with less than desired histories, eliminating qualified applicants who may have applied had they had access to the list of their competitors, and a potential landslide of unnecessary legislation exempting applications of all public positions.

Floridians have made a great investment in the state's colleges and universities, and the process of selecting applicants for these posts is an issue of wide public interest and concern. Who applies for positions within the college system or a state university, their qualifications and accomplishments, who is selected and who is not, is vitally important public information. To shield the selection process from public oversight and accountability is, we believe, bad public policy.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns on this issue, Representative Rommel. If you have any questions about our position, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Petersen, President

Cc: The Honorable Richard Corcoran, Speaker, Florida House of Representatives
The Honorable Byron Donalds, Florida House of Representatives
Jon Kaney, General Counsel, First Amendment Foundation
Sam Morley, General Counsel, Florida Press Association