



January 30, 2020

The Honorable Tom Lee, Chair
Senate Infrastructure and Security Committee
The Florida Senate
404 South Monroe Street, 410 Knott Building
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

RE: SPB 7048 – Public Records/Public Shelter Space

Dear Senator Lee:

I am writing on behalf of the First Amendment Foundation to express our concerns with SPB 7048, creating a public record exemption for certain information regarding people using public shelters during emergencies.

While we are not opposed to the exemptions for the address and telephone numbers, we are concerned with the exemption for the names of such persons. During a natural disaster or other emergency situation, the public wants to know whether their loved ones are safe. During emergency situations, power outages and poor cellphone coverage frequently make it more difficult to confirm that friends and family are safe. Therefore, access to the names of people who are using public shelters may be the only way for someone to make sure that their loved one is safe. For this reason, we think it imprudent to exempt from public records the names of people using public shelters during emergencies.

In addition, it is not clear from the constitutionally required statement of public necessity how exempting the names of individuals seeking shelter will protect them from persons seeking to take advantage of them after an emergency. Therefore, we respectfully request that SPB 7048 be amended to allow access to the names of people using public shelters during emergencies.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Pamela C. Marsh, President

Cc: The Honorable Bill Galvano, President, Florida Senate
Mr. Jim Baltzelle, Associated Press, Chair, First Amendment Foundation
Mr. Samuel Morley, General Counsel, Florida Press Association
Ms. Lisa Nellesen Savage, Chair, Florida Society of News Editors

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