



February 16, 2021

House Pandemics & Public Emergencies Committee
203 House Office Building
402 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: House Bill 327 – Public Records/Disaster Response

The First Amendment Foundation writes to express our concerns with House Bill 327, which creates a public records exemption for information regarding persons seeking shelter or assistance during an emergency.

We are not opposed to the exemptions for the address and telephone numbers; however, we are concerned with the exemption for the names of individuals using public shelters. During a natural disaster or other emergency situation, the public wants to know whether their loved ones are safe. During hurricanes, for instance, power outages and limited cellphone coverage make it more difficult to check whether family members are safe. Access to the names of individuals in shelters may be the only way for someone to confirm the location and wellbeing of their loved ones.

We suggest that House Bill 327 be amended to allow access to the names of individuals using shelters during emergencies. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

With best regards,

FIRST AMENDMENT FOUNDATION

Pamela C. Marsh
President

cc: The Honorable Chris Sprowls, Speaker, Florida House
The Honorable Bob Rommel, Representative Florida House
Jim Baltzelle, Associated Press, Chair, First Amendment Foundation
Samuel Morley, General Counsel, Florida Press Association
Lisa Nellesen Savage, Chair, Florida Society of News Editors

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