



February 15, 2021

Senate Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security  
Committee  
531 Knott Building  
404 S. Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: Senate Bill 418 – Public Records/Persons Seeking Shelter

The First Amendment Foundation writes to express our concerns with Senate Bill 418, 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 find out 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 in the midst of a disaster.

We suggest that Senate Bill 418 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela C. Marsh".

Pamela C. Marsh  
President

cc: The Honorable Wilton Simpson, President, Florida Senate  
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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