



March 1, 2021

House Government Operation Committee
209 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 find out whether family members are safe and whether loved ones evacuated or found shelter elsewhere. 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

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

JIM BALTZELLE, CHAIRMAN

Director Local Media Southeast,
The Associated Press

AMY HOLLYFIELD, VICE CHAIR

Senior Deputy Editor, *Tampa Bay Times*

FRANK DENTON, TREASURER

Retired Editor, *Florida Times-Union*

FARHOOD BASIRI

Co-Founder, *Bellwether Software Development*

DICK BATCHELOR

Founder and President,
Dick Batchelor Management Group, Inc.

MIKE DEESON

President, *Deeson Media*

JIM FOGLE

President and CEO, *Florida Press
Association/Intersect Media*

TRIMMEL GOMES

President, *Gomes Media Strategies*

THOMAS D. HALL

President, *TLH Consulting Group LLC*

CAROL JEAN LOCICERO

Attorney, *Thomas & LoCicero*

MIRA LOWE

Assistant Dean for Student Experience, *UF College of
Journalism & Communications*

Director, *The Innovation News Center*

CAROL MARBIN MILLER

Deputy Investigations Editor, *Miami Herald*

SAMUEL J. MORLEY

General Counsel, *Florida Press Association*

CAITIE MUÑOZ

Reporter, *WLRN Public Media*

PATRICK RICE

Editor, *Daytona Beach News-Journal*

BOB SHAW

Retired Editor, *Orlando Sentinel*

PETE WEITZEL

Director Emeritus

WENDY WALKER

President Emeritus, *Leadership Florida*

CHARLEY WILLIAMS

Past State Board, *League of Women Voters of Florida*
Director, *Business Development, GEC*

DAVE WILSON

Senior Editor, *The Miami Herald*