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Editorial: Voter Privacy Concerns Under Florida's Public Records Law

Senate Bill 1072 and House Bill 707 continue to progress through the legislative process as a result of voters expressing the concerns of their voter information as a public record. As governed by Florida's "Public Records Law", Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, voter registration information is public record. A voter's name, address, date of birth, party affiliation, and when they voted is public record.

Many Florida Supervisors of Elections, including myself and the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections (FSASE) are advocates for providing voters with additional protection of their voter information. However, the change must be made by the Florida Legislature.

Although, exemption from the "Public Records Law" is available for certain individuals, including victims of domestic violence and stalking and high-risk professionals, this process can be difficult to complete and there is no immediate way to retract their information from the public. This is extremely difficult for victims and families to comprehend and can be detrimental to their well-being and safety.

Additionally, Florida citizens can pre-register to vote at the age of 16 and 17. Once their application is processed and approved by the state, their information too becomes public record. With today's technology and availability of online resources, public information becomes easily discoverable for criminals and individuals with malicious intent. This is unsettling for parents that do not want their children's information disclosed to the public, especially when the children are still legally viewed as minors.

Finally, a voter's political party affiliation and voting history are also available as public information. Voters may feel that this information can be used as bias against them. Examples of this include, being overlooked as a job applicant because the employer supports an opposing party or being shamed for not voting.

As a result of this unintended impact of the "Public Records Law", some voters are turned off to voting and have even requested to be removed from the voter registration rolls and surrender their right to vote in exchange for additional protection of their privacy. This is a critical issue, and for years we have been actively seeking a solution. I encourage all of you to contact your legislators and express your thoughts and concerns on this issue. The solution starts with you.

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