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Summary: Address Confidentiality Program

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 12/8/2022 House Referred to Committee on **Judiciary**

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**VERSIONS OF THIS BILL**

[12/08/2022](https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess125_2023-2024/prever/3443_20221208.docx)

A bill

TO AMEND THE south carolina CODE OF LAWS BY ADDING ARTICLE 11 TO CHAPTER 7, TITLE 1 SO AS TO DEFINE NECESSARY TERMS; TO CREATE THE “ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM” IN THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL; TO PROVIDE PROCEDURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS IN TERMS OF ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS OF VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL OFFENSES, STALKING, OR HUMAN TRAFFICKING; TO PROVIDE A PENALTY WHEN A PERSON VIOLATES THAT CONFIDENTIALITY UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES; AND TO ALLOW THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO PROMULGATE RULES AND REGULATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THIS ARTICLE, AMONG OTHER THINGS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. Chapter 7, Title 1 of the S.C. Code is amended by adding:

Article 11

Address Confidentiality Program

 Section 1-7-1510. The General Assembly finds that the purpose of this article is to enable the State and its agencies to respond to requests for public records without disclosing the location of a victim of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking; to enable interagency cooperation in providing address confidentiality for victims of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking; and to enable the State and its agencies to accept a program participant’s use of an address designated by the Office of the Attorney General as a substitute address.

 Section 1‑7‑1520. For the purposes of this article, the term:

 (1) “Actual address or address” means a residential, work, or school street address as specified on the person’s application to be a program participant pursuant to the provisions of this article.

 (2) “Address Confidentiality Program” or “program” means a program in the Office of the Attorney General to protect the confidentiality of the address of a relocated victim of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking to prevent the victim’s assailants or potential assailants from finding the victim through public records.

 (3) “Agency of South Carolina” or “agency” includes every elected or appointed state or local public office, public officer, or official; institution, board, commission, bureau, council, department, authority, or other unit of government of the State or of any local government; or unit, special purpose district, or other political subdivision of state or local government.

 (4) “Application assistant” means an employee of an agency or nonprofit organization who provides counseling, referral, shelter, or other specialized services to victims of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking and who has been designated by the Attorney General to assist persons with applications to participate in the Address Confidentiality Program.

 (5) “Attorney General” means the Office of the Attorney General.

 (6) “Person” means any individual, corporation, limited liability company, partnership, trust, estate, or other association or any state, the United States, or any subdivision of these.

 (7) “Program participant” means a person accepted into the Address Confidentiality Program in accordance with the provisions of this article.

 (8) “Public record” means as defined in Section 30‑4‑20.

 (9) “Substitute address” means an address designated by the Attorney General under the Address Confidentiality Program.

 (10) “Victim of domestic violence” means a person against whom domestic violence, as provided in Chapter 25, Title 16, has been committed.

 (11) “Victim of sexual offenses” means a person against whom a sexual offense, as provided in Article 7, Chapter 3, Title 16, has been committed.

 (12) “Victim of stalking” means a person against whom stalking, as provided in Article 17, Chapter 3, Title 16, has been committed.

 (13) “Victim of human trafficking” means an individual against whom human trafficking or trafficking in persons, as provided in Article 19, Chapter 3, Title 16, has been committed.

 Section 1‑7‑1530. There is created the “Address Confidentiality Program” in the Office of the Attorney General to protect the confidentiality of the address of a relocated victim of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking to prevent the victim’s assailants or potential assailants from finding the victim through public records. Under this program, the Attorney General shall designate a substitute address for a program participant and act as the agent of the program participant for purposes of service of process and receiving and forwarding first‑class mail or certified or registered mail. The Attorney General is not required to forward any mail other than first‑class mail or certified or registered mail to the program participant. The Attorney General is not required to track or otherwise maintain records of any mail received on behalf of a program participant unless the mail is certified or registered mail.

 Section 1‑7‑1540. (A) A person who wants to participate in the Address Confidentiality Program shall file an application with the Attorney General with the assistance of an application assistant. Any of the following persons may apply to the Attorney General to have an address designated by the Attorney General to serve as the substitute address of the person:

 (1) an adult;

 (2) a parent or guardian acting on behalf of a minor when the minor resides with the person;

 (3) a guardian acting on behalf of an incapacitated person.

 (B) The application must be dated, signed, and verified by the applicant and must be signed by the application assistant who assisted in the preparation of the application.

 (C) The application must contain all of the following:

 (1) a statement by the applicant that the applicant is a victim of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking and that the applicant fears for his safety or the safety of his child;

 (2) evidence that the applicant is a victim of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking. This evidence may include any of the following:

 (a) law enforcement, court, or other federal or state agency records or files;

 (b) documentation from a domestic violence program if the applicant is alleged to be a victim of domestic violence;

 (c) documentation from a religious, medical, or other professional from whom the applicant has sought assistance in dealing with the alleged domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking;

 (d) documentation submitted to support a victim of human trafficking’s application for federal assistance or benefits under federal human trafficking laws;

 (3) a statement by the applicant that disclosure of the applicant’s address would endanger his safety or the safety of his child;

 (4) a statement by the applicant that he has or will confidentially relocate in this State;

 (5) a designation of the Attorney General as an agent for the applicant for purposes of service of process and the receipt of first‑class mail or certified or registered mail;

 (6) the mailing address and telephone number where the applicant can be contacted by the Attorney General;

 (7) the address that the applicant requests not to be disclosed by the Attorney General that directly relates to the increased risk of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking;

 (8) a statement as to whether there is any existing court order or court action involving the applicant related to divorce proceedings, child support, child custody, or child visitation and the court that issued the order or has jurisdiction over the action;

 (9) a statement by the applicant that to the best of his knowledge, the information contained in the application is true;

 (10) a recommendation of an application assistant that the applicant have an address designated by the Attorney General to serve as the substitute address of the applicant.

 (D) Upon the filing of a properly completed application, the Attorney General shall certify the applicant as a program participant. Upon certification, the Attorney General shall issue an Address Confidentiality Program authorization card to the program participant. The Address Confidentiality Program authorization card remains valid for so long as the program participant remains certified under the program.

 (E) Applicants must be certified for four years following the date of filing unless the certification is withdrawn or canceled prior to the end of the four-year period. A program participant may withdraw the certification by filing a request for withdrawal acknowledged before a notary with the Attorney General. A certification may be renewed by filing an application containing the information required by the Attorney General with the Attorney General at least thirty days prior to expiration of the current certification.

 Section 1‑7‑1550. (A) A program participant shall notify the Attorney General within thirty days after obtaining a legal name change by providing the Attorney General a certified copy of any judgment or order evidencing the change or any other documentation the Attorney General deems to be sufficient evidence of the name change. If the program participant fails to notify the Attorney General of a name change in the manner provided in this subsection, the Attorney General shall cancel the certification of the program participant in the program.

 (B) A program participant shall notify the Attorney General of a change in address or telephone number from the address or telephone number listed for the program participant on the application at least seven days before the change occurs. If the program participant fails to notify the Attorney General of a change in address or telephone number in the manner provided in this subsection, the Attorney General shall cancel the certification of the participant in the program.

 Section 1‑7‑1560. An applicant who falsely attests in an application that disclosure of the applicant’s address would endanger his safety or the safety of his child or who knowingly provides false information when applying for certification or renewal shall lose certification in the program. The Attorney General shall investigate violations of this section. Upon finding that a violation has occurred, the Attorney General shall assess a civil penalty against the applicant not to exceed five hundred dollars.

 Section 1‑7‑1570. (A) The Attorney General shall cancel the certification of a program participant under any of the following circumstances:

 (1) the program participant files a request for withdrawal of the certification pursuant to the provisions of this article;

 (2) the program participant fails to notify the Attorney General of a change in the program participant’s name, address, or telephone number listed on the application pursuant to the requirements of this article;

 (3) the program participant submitted false information in applying for certification to the program in violation of the provisions of Section 1‑7‑1560;

 (4) mail forwarded to the program participant by the Attorney General is returned as undeliverable.

 (B) The Attorney General shall send notice of cancellation to the program participant. Notice of cancellation shall state the reasons for cancellation. The program participant has thirty days to appeal the cancellation decision under procedures developed by the Attorney General.

 (C) Any records or documents pertaining to a program participant must be maintained in accordance with the procedures set up by the Attorney General to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the program participant.

 (D) A person who ceases to be a program participant is responsible for notifying persons who use the substitute address designated by the Attorney General as the program participant’s address that the designated substitute address is no longer the person’s address.

 Section 1‑7‑1580. (A) The program participant, and not the Attorney General, is responsible for requesting that agencies of the State use the address designated by the Attorney General as the substitute address of the program participant.

 (B) Except as otherwise provided in this section, when a program participant submits a current and valid Address Confidentiality Program authorization card to an agency of the State, the agency shall accept the address designation by the Attorney General on the authorization card as the program participant’s substitute address when creating a new public record.

 (C) An agency may request a waiver from the requirements of the Address Confidentiality Program by submitting a waiver request to the Attorney General. The agency’s waiver request must be in writing and include an explanation of why the agency cannot meet its statutory or administrative obligations by possessing or using the substitute address and an affirmation that, if the Attorney General accepts the waiver, the agency will only use the program participant’s actual address for those statutory or administrative purposes.

 (D) The Attorney General’s acceptance or denial of an agency’s waiver request must be made in writing and include a statement of specific reasons for acceptance or denial. Acceptance or denial of an agency’s waiver request is not subject to further review.

 (E) The State Election Commission shall use the actual address of a program participant for all election-related purposes and shall keep the address confidential from the public under the provisions of this article. Use of the actual address on letters placed in the United States mail by a board of elections are not considered a breach of confidentiality. The substitute address designation provided by the Attorney General may not be used as an address for voter registration or verification purposes.

 (F) For purposes of levying and collecting property taxes on motor vehicles as provided by law, the Attorney General shall issue to the county, city, or town assessor or tax collector a list containing the names and actual addresses of program participants residing in that county, city, or town. This list only may be used for the purposes of listing, appraising, or assessing taxes on motor vehicles and collecting property taxes on motor vehicles in the county, city, or town. The county, city, or town assessor or tax collector or any current or former officer, employee, or agent of any county, city, or town, who in the course of service to or employment by the county, city, or town has access to the name and actual address of a program participant, shall not disclose this information to any other person.

 (G) The substitute address designated by the Attorney General shall not be used for purposes of listing, appraising, or assessing taxes on property and collecting taxes on property as provided by law.

 (H) The substitute address designated by the Attorney General may not be used as an address by any register of deeds on recorded documents or for the purpose of indexing land registered as provided by law.

 (I) A local school district shall use the actual address of a program participant for any purpose related to admission or assignment as provided by the district and shall keep the actual address confidential from the public under the provisions of this article. The substitute address designated by the Attorney General may not be used as an address for admission or assignment purposes. For purposes of student records as required by the school district or otherwise provided by law, the substitute address designated by the Attorney General must be used.

 (J) Except as otherwise provided in this section, a program participant’s actual address and telephone number maintained by an agency of the State is not a public record within the meaning of Chapter 4, Title 30, the Freedom of Information Act. A program participant’s actual address or telephone number maintained by the Attorney General or disclosed by the Attorney General pursuant to this article is not a public record within the meaning of Chapter 4, Title 30, the Freedom of Information Act.

 Section 1‑7‑1590. (A) The Attorney General is prohibited from disclosing any address or telephone number of a program participant other than the substitute address designated by the Attorney General, except under the following circumstances:

 (1) the information is requested by a federal, state, or local law enforcement agency for official use only;

 (2) the information is required by direction of a court order. However, any person to whom a program participant’s address or telephone number has been disclosed shall not disclose the address or telephone number to any other person unless permitted to do so by order of the court;

 (3) upon request by an agency to verify the participation of a specific program participant when the verification is for official use only;

 (4) upon request by an agency, in the manner provided for in this article;

 (5) the program participant is required to disclose the program participant’s actual address as part of a registration required as authorized in this article.

 (B) The Attorney General shall provide immediate notification of disclosure to a program participant when disclosure is made pursuant to subsection (A)(2) or (4).

 (C) If, at the time of application, an applicant is subject to a court order related to divorce proceedings, child support, child custody, or child visitation, the Attorney General shall notify the court that issued the order of the certification of the program participant in the Address Confidentiality Program and the substitute address designated by the Attorney General. If, at the time of application, an applicant is involved in a court action related to divorce proceedings, child support, child custody, or child visitation, the Attorney General shall notify the court having jurisdiction over the action of the certification of the applicant in the Address Confidentiality Program and the substitute address designated by the Attorney General.

 (D) A person may not knowingly and intentionally obtain a program participant’s actual address or telephone number from the Attorney General or an agency knowing that the person is not authorized to obtain the address information.

 (E) An employee of the Attorney General or another state agency may not knowingly and intentionally disclose a program participant’s actual address or telephone number to a person known to the employee to be prohibited from receiving the program participant’s actual address or telephone number, unless the disclosure is permissible by law. This subsection only applies when an employee obtains a program participant’s actual address or telephone number during the course of the employee’s official duties and, at the time of disclosure, the employee has specific knowledge that the actual address or telephone number disclosed belongs to a program participant.

 (F) Any person who knowingly and intentionally obtains or discloses information in violation of this article is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, must be fined not more than two thousand five hundred dollars.

 Section 1‑7‑1600. (A) The Attorney General shall designate agencies of the State and nonprofit organizations that provide counseling and shelter services to victims of domestic violence, sexual offenses, stalking, or human trafficking to assist persons applying to be program participants. Any assistance and counseling rendered by the Attorney General or his designee to applicants may not be construed as legal advice.

 (B) The Attorney General, upon receiving notification pursuant to this article, within ninety-six hours of receiving the notification, shall issue the victim a letter of certification of eligibility or other relevant document entitling the person to have access to state benefits and services.

 Section 1‑7‑1610. The State, agencies of the State, and their officers, officials, employees, and agents, both past and present, in their official and individual capacities, are immune and held harmless from any liability in any action brought by or on behalf of any person injured or harmed by the actions or inactions of these entities and individuals in implementing the provisions of this article. However, if an employee’s actions resulting in harm were not within the course and scope of the employee’s duties, then that employee may be subject to civil liability as an individual to the extent permitted by the law.

 Section 1‑7‑1620. When the laws of this State provide a program participant a legal right to act within a prescribed period of ten days or less after the service of a notice or other paper upon the program participant, and the notice or paper is served upon the program participant by mail pursuant to this article, five days must be added to the prescribed period.

 Section 1‑7‑1630. The Attorney General is authorized to promulgate any rules and regulations deemed necessary to carry out the provisions of this article.

SECTION 2. Beginning with Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the General Assembly, in the annual general appropriations act, must appropriate funds to the Attorney General in order to develop and manage the Address Confidentiality Program.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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