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S.B. 225
136th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

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Version: As Passed by the Senate

Primary Sponsor: Sen. Manchester

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SUMMARY

Address Confidentiality Program

- Expands eligibility for the Address Confidentiality Program operated by the Secretary of State for certain crime victims and their household members.
- Adds a victim of a crime that caused serious physical harm or death, a victim of a crime in which the victim was threatened with a deadly weapon, and a household member of such a victim to the list of eligible persons.
- Allows an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves household members of crime victims, in addition to crime victims themselves, to be certified as an application assistant under the program.

Judges and prosecutors

- Exempts a judge's or prosecutor's residence address from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

Confidential addresses in election records

- Clarifies that a qualifying former designated public service worker may file a redaction request with a board of elections in the same manner as a designated public service worker may do under current law.
- Creates a procedure for protecting the residence address of a designated public service worker or qualifying former designated public service worker whose registration is challenged.
- Adds a similar procedure for any situation in which a person with a confidential address is a candidate for office and has the person's candidacy challenged.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Address Confidentiality Program

Background

The Secretary of State operates the Address Confidentiality Program, also known as Safe at Home. The program is designed to help certain crime victims and their household members shield their addresses and other personal information from disclosure as public records in order to protect them from further harm by an abuser or other person.

A program participant is assigned a substitute address – a post office box that leads to the Secretary's office – that the person may use for nearly all purposes, and the Secretary's office then forwards mail to the person's real address on a daily basis. The program also provides a way for a participant to register to vote and vote by mail without revealing the participant's home address, precinct, or county to the public. And, the law allows a participant who purchases real property to file a real property confidentiality notice with county officials in order to keep the participant's name confidential in connection with publicly available property records.[1]

Eligible crime victims

The bill expands the list of crimes that make a victim and the victim's household members eligible to participate in the Address Confidentiality Program to include (1) any crime that caused serious physical harm or death to the victim and (2) any crime in which the victim was threatened with a deadly weapon. Currently, the covered offenses are domestic violence, menacing by stalking, human trafficking, trafficking in persons, rape, and sexual battery.

Under continuing law, when applying to enter the program, an applicant must attest that the applicant fears for the safety of the applicant or a member of the applicant's household because the applicant or household member is a victim of a listed crime. A parent or guardian also may apply on behalf of a minor child or protected adult who is a victim or lives with a victim. Knowingly making a false attestation on the application is a first degree misdemeanor. The law does not require that the crime have been reported to the police or that any person have been charged with or convicted of the crime.

In other words, a person may become a program participant on the basis that the person is a crime victim or on the basis that the person's household member is a crime victim, if there is a safety concern for the victim, the household member, or both. Because the bill expands the eligible crime victims to include those who have been killed, the bill also allows a surviving household member to participate in the program even though the victim is not a participant.[2]

[1] R.C. 111.41 through 111.99.

[2] R.C. 111.42 and 111.99.

Application assistants

Continuing law requires any person who applies to enter the Address Confidentiality Program to be assisted by an application assistant who has received training and certification from the Secretary. An application assistant must be an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves victims of the listed crimes. The bill changes this definition by incorporating the additional crimes discussed above. The bill also allows an employee or volunteer at an agency or organization that serves *household members* of victims to serve as an application assistant – for example, an agency that offers counseling to the families of murder victims.[3]

Judges and prosecutors

The bill exempts a judge's or prosecutor's residence address from disclosure under the Public Records Law. Currently, judges and prosecutors are included as designated public service workers whose residential and familial information is generally exempt from disclosure, similar to law enforcement officers and other first responders. Protected information includes, for example, contact and employment details for a worker's spouse, former spouse, or child.

But, existing law makes judges' and prosecutors' residence addresses public because those individuals are elected officials who are legally required to live within the jurisdictions they serve. Under the bill, a person who wished to challenge a judge's or prosecutor's eligibility based on residence would need to obtain address information from some source other than public records maintained by a state or local agency in Ohio.[4]

Confidential addresses in election records

Notifying the board of elections

The bill clarifies that a qualifying former designated public service worker may file a redaction request with a board of elections in the same manner as a designated public service worker may do under current law. The existing Public Records Law allows such a former worker to do so, but the Election Law does not include a reference to it. A "qualifying former designated public service worker" is a former designated public service worker with a minimum of five years of qualifying service who was an employee in good standing at the completion of service.[5]

Voter registration challenges

For any person whose residence address must be kept confidential in election records – an Address Confidentiality Program participant, a designated public service worker, or a qualifying former designated public service worker – the bill expands the procedures for keeping the person's address confidential when the person's registration or candidacy is challenged.

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[3] R.C. 111.41.

[4] R.C. 149.43.

[5] R.C. 3503.13. See also R.C. 149.45, not in the bill.

Current law includes a procedure for protecting an Address Confidentiality Program participant's privacy if the person's voter registration is challenged. The challenger is not allowed to attend the hearing and does not receive notice of the hearing or the disposition. The hearing is closed, and any resulting public records must have the elector's residence address and precinct redacted.

The bill creates a similar, but not identical, procedure for a designated public service worker or qualifying former designated public service worker whose registration is challenged. The hearing must be closed, and the worker's residence address must be redacted from any resulting public records. However, the challenger is permitted to attend the hearing and to be notified of the outcome.[6]

Candidacy challenges

Finally, the bill adds a similar procedure for any situation in which a person with a confidential address is a candidate for office and has the person's candidacy challenged. The hearing must be closed to the public, but the challenger still must receive notice of the hearing. And, the person's residence address must be redacted from any resulting public records.[7]

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	06-18-25
Reported, S. Judiciary	05-20-26
Passed Senate (30-0)	05-20-26

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[6] R.C. 3503.24.

[7] R.C. 3513.053. See also R.C. 3513.041, 3513.05, 3513.262, and 3513.263, not in the bill.