Area Chambers Oppose Public Records Bills

Tampa, FL – The Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce, Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce, Greater Plant City Chamber of Commerce, South Tampa Chamber of Commerce, St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, Tampa Bay Beaches and Tampa Bay Partnership oppose House Bill 1151 and Senate Bill 1648 (passed by the Senate). These bills aim to create transparency in government, but instead have the unintended consequence of making public the records of each chamber of commerce, economic development organization and any other organization that have public agencies of any kind that are members.

There are two major impacts that HB 1151 and SB 1648 will have on membership organizations: the opening of records, including documents related to membership business and financial records; and some membership organizations may have to drop public partners in order to protect members and employees from records requests. That includes losing partners like airports, seaports and transportation authorities. These public organizations are dues-paying members and sponsors of chambers of commerce and economic development organizations because those groups have the responsibility of promoting that municipality or region for economic development. This provides the public organizations that are members an avenue to reduce their expenses for promoting their communities because the cost of advocacy and promotion are then shared by the business community through the Chambers and EDOs, allowing for greater impact.

Current state law requires public agencies to disclose their expenditures and information related to membership organizations. The burden of record keeping should remain there, not membership organizations.

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