

STATE OF NEW YORK

1436

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

January 12, 2021

Introduced by Sens. SERRANO, KRUEGER, STAVISKY -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Codes

AN ACT to amend the civil rights law, in relation to regulating the collection, recording and disclosing of confidential information obtained by state employees in the course of official duties

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. The civil rights law is amended by adding a new section
2 50-g to read as follows:

3 § 50-g. Disclosure of confidential information by state employees. 1.
4 Definitions. As used in this section:

5 a. "confidential information" means any information maintained or
6 obtained by a state agency, officer, or employee concerning an individ-
7 ual's health or disability status, income tax records, sexual orien-
8 tation, status as a victim of domestic violence, status as a crime
9 victim or witness, public assistance status, immigration status, or any
10 information that is otherwise protected from disclosure by any provision
11 of federal, state, or local law; and

12 b. "line worker" means any person employed by any state agency whose
13 duties involve contact with the public.

14 2. Procedure for the disclosure of confidential information.

15 a. Except as provided in paragraph b of this subdivision, no state
16 officer or employee shall disclose confidential information to anyone
17 except another state officer or employee acting in the scope of his or
18 her official duties.

19 b. Other than as provided in paragraph a of this subdivision, confi-
20 dential information may be disclosed only if:

21 (i) the officer's or employee's agency is required by law to disclose
22 such confidential information and provided that such disclosure shall be
23 limited to that required by law; or

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD03202-01-1

1 (ii) the officer's or employee's agency has been authorized, in writ-
2 ing signed by the individual or, if the individual is a minor or other-
3 wise incompetent, such authorization has been signed by the individual's
4 parent or legal guardian, to disclose such confidential information, and
5 provided that the disclosure shall be limited to that authorized in
6 writing by the individual; or

7 (iii) there is reasonable suspicion or probable cause to believe that
8 a person is engaging in criminal activity and the disclosure of confi-
9 dential information is necessary to cooperate with a law enforcement
10 agency or agencies investigating that criminal activity; or

11 (iv) such confidential information is to be used by a federal, state,
12 or local government agency, and solely for the purpose of compiling
13 statistical information, provided that the disclosure shall be limited
14 to that necessary to compile such statistical information, and provided
15 further that the recipient of the information ensures, in writing in
16 advance of any disclosure, that the confidential information disclosed
17 will not be further disclosed to any other agency or other individual.

18 3. Procedure for the collecting and/or recording of confidential
19 information. This subdivision shall apply to any documentation, ques-
20 tionnaire, interview sheet, or other form used in relation to benefits
21 or services provided by the state.

22 a. No state officer or employee shall make inquiries regarding confi-
23 dential information of any individual, when such individual, on his or
24 her behalf or on behalf of another, is applying for, or is receiving,
25 any service or benefit provided by the state, unless such confidential
26 information is specifically required by federal or state law as a condi-
27 tion of receipt of such service or benefit.

28 b. If confidential information is required by federal or state law as
29 a condition of receipt of a service or benefit provided by the state,
30 the state officer or employee shall make only those inquiries necessary
31 to determine if an applicant or recipient is qualified for and otherwise
32 meets the conditions for receipt of such service or benefit.

33 c. No state officer or employee shall collect and/or record informa-
34 tion regarding the immigration status of an applicant for, or recipient
35 of, any service or benefit unless such immigration status is required by
36 federal or state law. Where federal or state law requires the recording
37 of such confidential immigration status information, only that informa-
38 tion specifically required shall be recorded.

39 4. Designation of access officer responsible for authorizing the
40 release of confidential information. The head or governing body of each
41 agency shall designate one or more persons with supervisory authority,
42 and assign to such persons the further authority to approve and author-
43 ize the release of confidential information. The designation shall
44 include the name, specific job title, telephone number, and business
45 address of each such designated access officer. When approving and
46 authorizing the release of confidential information, a designated access
47 officer shall specify, in writing, the specific information to be
48 disclosed, and the persons or entities to whom such disclosure shall be
49 made. The designated access officer shall ensure that any disclosure is
50 authorized by law and within the limits as provided by law.

51 5. Disclosure by line workers of confidential information. No line
52 worker employed by a state agency shall disclose confidential informa-
53 tion without obtaining prior written approval from a designated access
54 officer responsible for approving and authorizing the release of confi-
55 dential information for that agency.

1 6. Review of a complaint. Upon receipt of a complaint, the state agen-
2 cy shall determine immediately whether there are reasonable grounds for
3 an investigation. Such investigation shall be conducted in a manner
4 prescribed in the regulations set forth by the director of the state
5 agency or an authorized representative. If the director or authorized
6 representative determines that the investigation and resolution of such
7 complaint is more suitably handled by another state agency, then such
8 director or authorized representative shall immediately forward such
9 complaint to the appropriate agency. The state agency shall maintain a
10 file concerning such complaints through such agency's completion or
11 action thereon. Any state agency receiving a complaint pursuant to this
12 subdivision shall provide upon request, written notice of the final
13 determination of or action upon such complaint.

14 7. Violation. Any state agency which employs a person who has been
15 charged with the disclosure of confidential information in violation of
16 the provisions of this article shall be subject to a civil penalty of an
17 amount not to exceed one thousand dollars.

18 8. Other laws respecting confidentiality. Nothing herein reduces or
19 abridges any other protection in federal, state, or local law respecting
20 the confidentiality of information.

21 9. Severability. If any section, subdivision, sentence, clause, phrase
22 or other portion of this section is, for any reason, declared unconsti-
23 tutional or invalid, in whole or in part, by any court of competent
24 jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed severable, and such unconsti-
25 tutionality or invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining
26 portions of this section, which remaining portions shall continue in
27 full force and effect.

28 § 2. This act shall take effect immediately. Effective immediately,
29 the addition, amendment and/or repeal of any rule or regulation neces-
30 sary for the implementation of this act on its effective date are
31 authorized to be made and completed on or before such effective date.