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LRB-1831/1 JTK:mfd:kat

1997 SENATE BILL 137

March 26, 1997 - Introduced by Senator Adelman, by request of Attorney General James E. Doyle. Referred to Committee on Judiciary, Campaign Finance Reform and Consumer Affairs.

AN ACT to create 19.975 of the statutes; relating to: authorization for the attorney general and district attorneys to issue subpoenas to investigate alleged violations of the open meetings law.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Currently, under the open meetings law, with certain exceptions, meetings of state and local governmental bodies are required to be held in open session, and certain notice of meetings is required to be given. The law is enforced by the attorney general or, upon the verified complaint of any person, by the district attorney of any county where a violation occurs. Civil penalties are prescribed for violations. Any public document, including a document that is produced in a closed session of a governmental body or in a civil investigatory proceeding, is potentially open to public inspection unless otherwise specifically provided by law or unless the custodian demonstrates, at the time that a request for access is made, that the public interest in withholding access to the document outweighs the strong public interest in providing access. Currently, the attorney general and district attorneys have no general authority to issue subpoenas to investigate alleged civil offenses under the open meetings law before an enforcement action is commenced in court.

This bill permits the attorney general and any district attorney to issue subpoenas for the purpose of requiring testimony or the production of documents to aid in the investigation of an alleged violation of the open meetings law. The bill provides that no person may be excused from testifying or producing a document upon the ground that the testimony or document relates to business conducted in a

SENATE BILL 137

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closed session of a governmental body. The bill also provides that any document that is produced or created as a result of the issuance of a subpoena under the bill is not subject to the right of inspection or copying unless the information contained in that document is subject to that right under the open records law.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. 19.975 of the statutes is created to read:

19.975 Investigations. The attorney general, or a district attorney upon receipt of a verified complaint, may subpoen any person to give testimony or to require the production of any document to aid in the investigation of an alleged violation of this subchapter, and may enforce compliance with any subpoena as provided in s. 885.12. No person may be excused from testifying or producing any document in obedience to a subpoena issued under this section upon the ground that the testimony or document relates to business conducted in a closed session authorized under s. 19.85. No document that is produced or created as a result of the issuance of a subpoena under this section is subject to the right of public inspection or copying unless the information contained in that document is subject to that right under s. 19.35 (1).

13 (END)