

1-F-5 | CIVIL ACTIONS FOR INJUNCTIVE OR DECLARATORY RELIEF

Section 286.011(2), F.S., states that the circuit courts have jurisdiction to issue injunctions upon application by any citizen of this state. See *Allen v. United Faculty of Miami-Dade College*, 197 So. 3d 604 (Fla. 3d DCA 2016) (Public Employees Relations Commission [PERC] properly dismissed unfair labor practice charge alleging a violation of the Sunshine Law, as s. 286.011, F.S., is enforceable only by the courts, not by PERC). Cf. *Godheim v. City of Tampa*, 426 So. 2d 1084, 1088 (Fla. 2d DCA 1983), rejecting an argument that Godheim lacked standing to raise a Sunshine Law violation, and finding that the Sunshine Law on its face gives him standing without regard to whether he suffered a special injury. Accord *Florida Citizens Alliance, Inc. v. School Board of Collier County*, 328 So. 3d 22 (Fla. 2d DCA 2021) ('The School Board concedes on appeal that the trial court erred in ruling that the Plaintiffs lacked standing,' citing *Godheim*).

While normally irreparable injury must be proved by the plaintiff before an injunction may be issued, in Sunshine Law cases the mere showing that the law has been violated constitutes "irreparable public injury." *Town of Palm Beach v. Gradison*, 296 So. 2d 473 (Fla. 1974); and *Times Publishing Company v. Williams*, 222 So. 2d 470 (Fla. 2d DCA 1969), disapproved in part on other grounds, *Neu v. Miami Herald Publishing Company*, 462 So. 2d 821 (Fla. 1985). The plaintiff's burden is to "establish by the greater weight of the evidence" that a meeting which should have been held in the sunshine took place on the date alleged. *Lyon v. Lake County*, 765 So. 2d 785, 789 (Fla. 5th DCA 2000).

A complaint for injunctive relief must allege by name or sufficient description the identity of the public official with whom the defendant public official has violated the Sunshine Law. *Deerfield Beach Publishing, Inc. v. Robb*, 530 So. 2d 510 (Fla. 4th DCA 1988). And see *Forehand v. School Board of Gulf County, Florida*, 600 So. 2d 1187 (Fla. 1st DCA 1992) (plaintiff was not denied a fair and impartial hearing because the board only briefly deliberated in public before a vote was taken as there was no evidence that the board had privately deliberated on this issue); and *Law and Information Services v. City of Riviera Beach*, 670 So. 2d 1014 (Fla. 4th DCA 1996) (patent speculation, absent any allegation that a nonpublic meeting in fact occurred, is insufficient to state a cause of action).

Although a court cannot issue a blanket order enjoining any violation of the Sunshine Law based upon a finding that the law



was violated in particular respects, a court may enjoin a future violation that bears some resemblance to the past violation. See *Board of Public Instruction of Broward County v. Doran*, 224 So. 2d 693, 699-700 (Fla. 1969), *Port Everglades Authority v. International Longshoremen's Association, Local 1922-1*, 652 So. 2d 1169, 1173 (Fla. 4th DCA 1995), and *Citizens for Sunshine, Inc. v. Martin County School Board*, 125 So. 3d 184 (Fla. 4th DCA 2013). See also *Wood v. Marston*, 442 So. 2d 934 (Fla. 1983) (trial court's permanent injunction affirmed). Compare *Leach-Wells v. City of Bradenton*, 734 So. 2d 1168, 1170n. 1 (Fla. 2d DCA 1999), in which the court noted that had a citizen appealed the trial court's denial of her motion for temporary injunction based on a selection committee's alleged violation of the Sunshine Law, the appellate court "would have had the opportunity to review this matter before the project was completed and to direct that the City be enjoined from entering into a final contract with the developer until after such time as the ranking of the proposals could be accomplished in compliance with the Sunshine Law."

The future conduct must be "specified, with such reasonable definiteness and certainty that the defendant could readily know what it must refrain from doing without speculation and conjecture." *Port Everglades Authority v. International Longshoremen's Association, Local 1922-1*, supra, quoting from *Board of Public Instruction v. Doran*, 224 So. 2d 693, 699 (Fla. 1969). And see *Lozman v. City of Riviera Beach*, No. 502007CA007552XXXXMB (Fla. 15th Cir. Ct. June 9, 2009), per curiam affirmed, 46 So. 3d 573 (Fla. 4th DCA 2010), available online in the Cases database at the open government site at myfloridalegal.com (injunctive relief against future violations of city to record minutes of certain meetings appropriate in light of city's past conduct and consistent refusal to record such minutes even after being advised to do so by the city attorney and because the city "has continuously taken the legal position that local governments are not required by the Sunshine Law to record minutes").

Declaratory relief is not appropriate where no present dispute exists but where governmental agencies merely seek judicial advice different from that advanced by the Attorney General and the state attorney or an injunctive restraint on the prosecutorial discretion of the state attorney. *Askew v. City of Ocala*, 348 So. 2d 308 (Fla. 1977).

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