

## Proposed State Law Changes in Public Record Listings

Ever since the advent of the Internet and searchable databases there has been an understandable concern among those in sensitive positions or situations that they could be more readily “found” than before.

This was one of the first things we heard when our property search website went on line. From the outset, we have advised everyone that the **best solution** has been to place property in “trustee name”. In this way the owner’s name will not appear in any of our records – either on the Internet or in the office. And, more importantly, the property can not be *singled out* or *easily identified* as owned by someone attempting to shield their ownership. There are several thousand “trustee name” properties in our records.

Obviously this is the perfect answer for peace officers and everyone else offering full protection against being found by searches. Unfortunately, the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) state leadership had no interest in this option, apparently preferring instead to lobby and pressure legislators to create a “special class” of property ownership designated by “initials” in place of names for police officers.

When their first attempt to accomplish this failed, additional requirements were quietly slipped into the state Budget bill in 2009. This was done with no hearings or discussion on this particular detail as usually attends changes in state law.

The provisions of this language have widespread implications well beyond simply removing police officers’ names from the Internet. Among them are tax records, property deeds, Board of Revision complaints and even voting rolls. And anyone who replaces their name with “initials” in public records could face unexpected legal complications and additional expense when they attempt to sell their property.

In the meantime, specifically for the protection of police officers and everyone else in a sensitive position or situation, I have avoided a public dispute on this serious issue with the state FOP leadership. I have always felt that any publicity about this could give bad people ideas they may not now have.

While it is now possible for a police officer to replace their name in our records with initials I strongly advise against it. The initials in our database immediately identify the owner as most likely someone in law enforcement. This amounts to calling attention to them like never before!

I believe the option of “trustee name” is the best way to protect police officers and their families from being found through searches on our website – or anywhere else in public records. Many owners make use of this option and it receives no special attention. Any attorney can handle the change and it should not be complicated or expensive.

Now an expansion of this special treatment for police officers to various other individuals in sensitive positions is again being sought through the State Legislature. There is no need for such legislation. For all property owners the “trustee name” option remains available to anyone who wishes to use it.

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