

MAINE SERVICE CENTERS COALITION

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Testimony of the Maine Service Centers Coalition LD 152, An Act to Amend the Freedom of Access Act to Require a Specific Time Frame for Agencies to Comply with Requests for Public Records

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, the Maine Service Centers Coalition is submitting testimony in opposition to LD 152, An Act to Amend the Freedom of Access Act to Require a Specific Time Frame for Agencies to Comply with Requests for Public Records.

The Maine Service Centers Coalition, comprised of 26 towns and cities across the state, articulates the importance of healthy and thriving service center communities, advocates for public policy that supports and contributes to the economic and social viability of our communities, and collaborates with municipal officials, legislators, state agencies and nonprofits to pursue quality of life for all who live and work in our state.

Under current law, when a Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) request is made, public entities, including municipalities, must “within a reasonable time” provide “a good faith, nonbinding estimate of the time frame within which the agency or official will comply with the request.” If a response is not received within a reasonable time frame, an appeal process is in place and a Public Access Ombudsman within the Attorney General’s Office is available to assist.

The law, as written, provides municipalities with the necessary time to respond to FOAA requests, and our municipalities make every effort to reply quickly, completely and accurately. As you’re aware, some requests cover thousands of pages of documents, often contained in multiple file systems, that must be manually reviewed for redactions. Fulfilling these requests demands a significant amount of time and work.

LD 152 would require all FOAA research, reviews and redactions be completed within a 30-day time frame. This would place enormous pressures on already thinly stretched municipal personnel and would not be a prudent allocation of our tight municipal resources and our taxpayers’ dollars. We urge you to vote ought not to pass on LD 152.

Thank you for your time.