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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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**Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary on  
LD 12, An Act to Amend the Freedom of Access Act to Apply to Legislative  
Caucuses  
February 5, 2025**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to sponsor LD 12, "An Act to Amend the Freedom of Access Act to Apply to Legislative Caucuses."

Have you ever been in a work session on one of your bills and know that the committee supports your proposal only to see the committee break for caucuses and come back to vote against your bill? I have. I'm sure several of you have. If only we could hear the conversations that swayed our colleagues.

Transparency is a vital tool that keeps lawmakers accountable to the people we represent. LD 12 will add a new level of transparency to the legislative process. It will ensure the public can see how decisions are made, who is influencing those decisions, and the reasoning behind our policies or laws.

People from across the state participate in our legislative process during public hearings. Imagine feeling so passionate about a bill and driving 80 miles to Augusta, waiting two hours in a committee room, and pouring your heart out in testimony before a group of strangers. We all have constituents who do this.

Now, imagine you think you have the support of the committee but then see an ONTP report come out. Naturally, you would want to know what happened and how you can adjust for the future. It is disheartening to have no answers. Frankly, the worst offender in this area is the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, of which I was a member last session. The public, as well as other legislators, should benefit from transparency of this decision-making.

Was a certain decision reached as part of some questionable agreement? If reached behind closed doors, there is no way to refute the suspicions created. And no way for real answers or accountability. Our constituents deserve to know how and why their elected officials come to their decisions. Concealing the reasons leads to distrust and discourages public participation.

These are the rules that city councilors, town select boards, and elected officials all over the state and country have to follow. Why do we, as public servants for the people we represent, get to be exempted from this requirement?

Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 12.