



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Quentin Chapman introducing*  
**L.D. 1683, An Act to Make a Freedom of Access Act Request Free of Charge upon Petition**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*  
April 16, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Quentin Chapman, proudly representing House District 88 in Auburn. I am proud to present L.D. 1683, "An Act to Make a Freedom of Access Act Request Free of Charge upon Petition."

I urge you to support a policy that would make Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests free when accompanied by a petition of 150 signatures and require agencies to provide status updates to requesters every 30 days.

**Why This Matters to Maine's Progressive Values.** Promoting Equity in Access to Information. The Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) is a cornerstone of Maine's commitment to open government, ensuring that all citizens can hold public institutions accountable. However, fees associated with FOIA requests—sometimes thousands of dollars—can create barriers, particularly for low-income individuals, community organizers, and grassroots groups. By waiving fees for requests backed by 150 signatures, we ensure that collective civic engagement is not stifled by financial hurdles. This aligns with progressive principles of equity, ensuring that access to public records is a right, not a privilege reserved for those who can afford it.

**Encouraging Civic Participation.** Requiring 150 signatures demonstrates significant community interest in a request, reflecting the same spirit of collective action that powers Maine's citizen initiatives and people's vetoes. This threshold is reasonable—comparable to signature requirements for local petitions (e.g., 10% of votes cast in the last gubernatorial election for municipal petitions)—and ensures that the policy benefits groups with broad public support, such as advocacy

organizations, neighborhood coalitions, or concerned citizens addressing issues like environmental justice, education funding, or public health. Supporting this policy empowers Mainers to actively participate in democracy, a value I know this committee holds dear.

**Enhancing Trust Through Transparency.** Requiring agencies to provide status updates every 30 days addresses a common frustration: the uncertainty and delays that can accompany FOIA requests. Maine's FOIA already mandates a response within five working days and a "reasonable" time for record production, but requesters often face long waits without clear communication. Regular updates would demonstrate accountability, build public trust, and ensure agencies are acting in good faith. For liberal lawmakers committed to responsive governance, this is an opportunity to strengthen the public's confidence in our institutions.

**Addressing Potential Concerns.** I understand concerns about administrative costs or potential abuse of a fee waiver. However, the 150-signature threshold acts as a natural safeguard, ensuring that only requests with demonstrated public support qualify. This mirrors existing Maine processes, such as the petition to require agency rulemaking, which mandates rulemaking proceedings for petitions with 150 signatures. Additionally, the 30-day update requirement aligns with the Secretary of State's 30-day timeline for certifying petition signatures, proving that such intervals are manageable for state agencies. To further mitigate costs, agencies could use standardized templates for updates, minimizing administrative burden while maximizing transparency.

**A Step Toward a More Democratic Maine.** Maine has a proud tradition of direct democracy, from citizen initiatives to town meetings. By making FOIA requests free with 150 signatures and requiring regular status updates, we can extend this legacy, ensuring that all Mainers—regardless of income—can access the information they need to advocate for their communities. This policy is a practical, equitable, and progressive step toward a more transparent and inclusive democracy.

Thank you.

Quentin Chapman  
State Representative