



### **Testimony in Support of LD 1683:**

**“An Act to Make a Freedom of Access Act Request Free of Charge upon Petition”**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free-market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1683, “An Act to Make a Freedom of Access Act Request Free of Charge upon Petition.”

The Maine Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes individual liberty, economic freedom, and government transparency in the state of Maine. In line with this mission, we strongly support efforts to expand public access to government records and ensure accountability in public administration.

LD 1683 takes a crucial step toward increasing transparency. By waiving Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) fees for requests accompanied by a petition of at least 150 registered Maine voters, this bill empowers citizens and grassroots organizations to pursue critical information without the barrier of potentially costly processing fees.

Currently, the financial burden of FOAA fees can hinder legitimate public inquiries, particularly those initiated by concerned citizens, local activists, independent journalists, and civic organizations operating on limited budgets. Such barriers ultimately deter public engagement and reduce government accountability. LD 1683 directly addresses this problem by giving the people a new tool to seek transparency through collective action.

Under this bill, 150 voters from across the state must take the time to sign their names on a request for the fee waiver to be applied. This is not an arbitrary or frivolous threshold; it ensures that waived requests reflect genuine public interest. In this way, the bill strikes a thoughtful balance between access and administrative feasibility.

Remember that it only takes 150 people to propose a regulatory petition to any state agency.<sup>1</sup> If 150 people can do that, then they should also be able to submit a FOAA request without paying.

In addition, the bill would require agencies to provide status updates on requests every 30 working days. This provision increases transparency in the process, fosters trust, and holds agencies to a reasonable standard of communication.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/5/title5sec8055.html>



Public records belong to the people. Mainers should not be forced to pay excessive fees to obtain documents they already fund through their taxes. When hundreds of Mainers collectively seek clarity from their government, it is both fiscally and ethically justifiable to remove this financial hurdle.

This measure is consistent with Maine's longstanding commitment to open government. It builds upon the intent of the Freedom of Access Act by expanding the ability of ordinary citizens to engage in oversight, elevate concerns, and ensure that government remains answerable to the people it serves.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1683. Thank you for your time and consideration.