

MAINE SERVICE CENTERS COALITION

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Testimony of the Maine Service Centers Coalition LD 1788, An Act to Strengthen the Freedom of Access Act by Categorizing Commercial Requesters

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, the Maine Service Centers Coalition is submitting testimony in support of LD 1788, An Act to Strengthen the Freedom of Access Act by Categorizing Commercial Requesters.

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.

You're well aware some Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) 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.

Our service center communities are receiving a growing number of FOAA requests from commercial enterprises seeking information for private profit purposes and from law firms seeking discovery for legal proceedings. These requests are placing enormous pressures on already thinly stretched municipal personnel and are a financial burden on our tight municipal resources and our taxpayers' dollars.

LD 1788 would define a "commercial request" and allow our cities and towns to "establish a fee structure and charge a fee for a commercial request." This would give our municipalities a revenue source to help recoup a portion, or perhaps all, of the costs our staffs expend responding to these requests. The bill would not change the fee structure for noncommercial requests, such as those made by private citizens or the media.

We respectfully ask you to vote ought to pass on LD 1788.

Thank you for your time.