

June 13, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
H-232 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Democratic Leader  
H-204 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

We, the undersigned good government, transparency, and civil liberties organizations, are writing to express our strong support for S. 337, the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 and ask that the House of Representatives vote on and pass this bill as soon as possible. Senators Grassley, Cornyn, and Leahy introduced this bill in the Senate, where it passed unanimously, to amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to promote greater government transparency and accountability. Representatives Chaffetz, Cummings, and Issa have determinedly led the efforts to strengthen FOIA in the House of Representatives.

Congress meant for FOIA to be an effective and efficient tool for granting public access to government information; however, the experiences of FOIA requestors over the past few years makes clear the need for reforms that ensure the law is implemented as Congress intended. Specifically, the FOIA Improvement Act significantly improves requestors' ability to obtain information about government actions and decision-making. Particular reforms included in S. 337 that we support include:

1. Codifying the presumption of openness for future administrations, thereby requiring agencies to disclose information unless there is a foreseeable harm or legal requirement to withhold the information.
2. Ending secrecy for 25-year-old drafts and other internal deliberations not otherwise exempt from disclosure, thereby curbing the overuse of FOIA's Exemption 5 to withhold historical records that will help the public better understand how a policy was developed.
3. Codifying requirements to make more preemptive disclosures so fewer FOIA requests will be necessary to make records available to the public.

These reforms to FOIA have been hard-fought, and the President has pledged to sign this legislation if it reaches his desk.

At a time when Congress is so divided, it is encouraging to see not only bipartisan cooperation, but also bicameral cooperation to move this legislation forward. There would be no more appropriate way for Congress to honor the upcoming 50th anniversary of FOIA on July 4, 2016, than to strengthen it by passing S. 337.

We support the efforts of Representatives Chaffetz and Cummings to ensure the nation can celebrate FOIA's 50th anniversary with a stronger and better statute, one that enhances the public's capacity to hold its officials accountable, and to understand the workings of our government.

To reach our groups, you or your staff may contact Liz Hempowicz, Policy Counsel at the Project On Government Oversight, at 202-347-1122 or [ehempowicz@pogo.org](mailto:ehempowicz@pogo.org).

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)  
American Association of Law Libraries  
American Society of News Editors and Association of Alternative Newsmedia  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Association of Research Libraries  
Bill of Rights Defense Committee/Defending Dissent Foundation  
Campaign for Liberty  
Cause of Action Institute  
Center for Media and Democracy  
Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington  
Community Research  
Data Coalition  
Fight for the Future  
Free Speech Coalition  
Government Accountability Project  
National Freedom of Information Coalition  
National Security Archive  
National Security Counselors  
OpenTheGovernment.Org  
PEN America  
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)  
Public Citizen  
Reclaim The Records  
Society of Professional Journalists  
Sunlight Foundation  
Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC)  
Washington Coalition for Open Government

Cc: Members of the House of Representatives