

Sunshine in Government Initiative

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March 8, 2016

Senator Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
Dirksen Senate Office Building 152
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
Dirksen Senate Office Building 224
Washington, DC 20510

Senator John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Christopher Coons
United States Senate
127A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, Senator Cornyn and Senator Coons,

We are writing to thank you for your hard work advancing the FOIA Improvement Act of 2015 (S. 337) out of the Senate Judiciary Committee and express support for bringing this vital bipartisan, good government legislation to the Senate floor for a vote.

The Sunshine in Government Initiative is a coalition composed of newspaper, media and journalist organizations to promote transparency in government. SGI members include: American Society of News Editors, The Associated Press, Association of Alternative Newsmedia, National Newspaper Association, Newspaper Association of America, Online News Association, Radio Television Digital News Association, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Society of Professional Journalists.

Like the legislation unanimously approved by the Senate in the 113th Congress, S. 337 takes several important steps to make FOIA work better. Among the many improvements, the bill:

- Writes into law the existing presumption of openness for future administrations,
- Ensures the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) speaks with the independence that Congress intended when Congress established OGIS in 2007 to mediate disputes and recommend improvements to agency FOIA practices,
- Makes FOIA more efficient by modernizing technology tools, and
- Ends secrecy for 25-year-old internal deliberations not otherwise exempt from disclosure.

The national Sunshine Week (March 13-19, 2016) will highlight the importance of open government and evaluate efforts to strengthen transparency in government at all levels. And with the 50th anniversary of the enactment of the original Freedom of Information Act approaching on July 4, 2016, now is the time for Congress to enact improvements to FOIA that will enhance government transparency and accountability. It is our hope that this good government bill will pass the United State Senate without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Blum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rick Blum, Director

cc: Members, United States Senate