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Subject: support of SB 1506 as introduced
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To the Senate Committee on General Government:

I'm writing in support of SB 1506 as introduced, and in opposition to the League of Cities' proposed amendment. Open public records are an essential aspect of giving the public oversight of public work.

Both in my past work as a journalist and my current work as a policy analyst for a sustainability think tank, the ability to request public records has been not only a valuable tool in its own right but also a backstop to numerous informal requests for timely information - "you'll have to turn this over anyway, so just send it to me please and spare us both the trouble." Exchanges like this are an implicit part of the working relationship between every beat reporter and PIO in the state. The speedy exchange of information this creates has value in itself, because timeliness is a crucial factor in bringing not just public scrutiny but public attention to issues of public interest.

For several years, I ran a small nonprofit magazine serving Portland transit riders. On various occasions I was able to bring new public interest stories to light that other outlets would have likely missed: a sharp drop in fare enforcement, TriMet executives getting [healthy and surreptitious raises](#) just before a high-profile budget cut and fare hike. Later, working for the independent website BikePortland.org, I used public records to show that ODOT's vague claims of public outcry over a proposed no-cost redesign to improve safety on SW Barbur had been [essentially fabricated](#). As part of small organizations with no legal budgets, I had almost no leverage over TriMet or ODOT - they didn't even need to return my calls. The only reason they had to play ball with me was the knowledge that, even without a lawyer, I might be able to acquire enough information for a damning story even without their participation. Despite this, I encountered constant and obviously deliberate foot-dragging on record requests when I did submit them, even when the costs of compliance would have been negligible.

A strong public records regime does create some expenses for government, and the public does have an interest in keeping some internal conversations internal. But without a strong independent public records advocate, government agencies with internal agendas end up serving as their own defense, judge and jury. And this, too, can increase the costs of local government: a recent study found that the closure of a daily newspaper is correlated with a long-term drop in municipal bond ratings, presumably due to the lack of public oversight. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Murphy-et-al.pdf>

Please take steps to preserve and strengthen public oversight in Oregon by preserving a

strong, independent public records advocate.

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