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## The Acting Public Records Advocate supports the passage of SB 500-2

February 11, 2021

Oregon State Senate Labor and Business Committee

**Subject: Oregon Senate Bill 500-2**

Sent via email to: [sggep.exhibits@oregonlegislature.com](mailto:sggep.exhibits@oregonlegislature.com)

Dear Senators Riley, Hansell, Jama, Kennemer, and Lieber:

As the Acting Public Records Advocate for the State of Oregon, I am writing to express my support for the passage of Senate Bill 500-2.

The core duties of the Public Records Advocate are to mediate disputes between public records requesters and custodians, provide training to public employees on the letter and spirit of the public records law, and to lead the Public Records Advisory Council, a deep bench of bi-partisan public records experts representing state and local public bodies, the media and the public. Moreover, during my time in the office as both the Deputy and then Acting Public Records Advocate, I have come to believe that these duties warrant broader interpretation, and have routinely offered trainings to members of the public as well, since an educated requester is a better requester, and policy review for any Oregon public body that is developing or updating their public records policies. The Public Records Advisory Council has been an integral partner in this work, providing guidance and support on the direction of the office.

That is why I am so pleased that SB 500-2 represents the combined wisdom of the members of the Council, along with my own input, on the best way for anyone serving in the role of Advocate to effectively carry out their duties without fear of undue political influence. At the same time, this bill provides for standing up an administratively sound state agency that has a strong internal structure and clear continuity of leadership. Doing so is necessary to fully focus its limited resources on continuing the day-to-day work of being an impartial, consistently reliable office that has become a trusted voice in the ongoing conversation about transparency and access to information in Oregon. For instance, since the office began its operations on April 25, 2018, it has successfully completed 487 individual requests for assistance about public records disputes, and trained thousands of public employees, as well as members of the media and public, in groups as small as six and as large as 200.

Although this is not the first time the question of the independence of the office has been before the legislature, I hope it will be the last. Previously, SB 1506 promulgated during the 2020 legislative session, also sought independence for the office but left unanswered important questions about issues like funding and leadership during the absence of a permanent advocate. SB 1506 passed the Senate with the support of all members present, and passed out of committee in the House with a “do pass” recommendation but could not be voted on by the full House before the session came to an early conclusion. SB 500-2 answers those questions with a holistic response

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that will allow the Public Records Advocate's office, version 2.0, to hit the ground running upon passage.

My office would appreciate your support on this important proposal to ensure the independence of the Advocate and the Council's work.

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