

Chair Lieber and Vice-Chair Knopp, for the record my name is Janelle Bynum, and I am the State Representative for House District 39. I am providing this testimony today in support of Senate Bill 510 because I believe it is essential that we ensure adequate funding for the Office of the Public Records Advocate to continue its mission of making Oregon public records system more accessible to citizens.

In 2017, this legislative body created the Office of the Public Records Advocate to serve two primary functions: (1) provide state agencies and local governments trainings on record request processes and procedures to increase efficiency, and (2) act as a mediator when public bodies and requestors dispute the scope, cost, or exemption status of a records request. These two functions provide for a more effective public records system and resolves disputes at a lesser cost to requestors and taxpayers.

Senate Bill 510 ensures adequate stable funding for the Public Records Advocate office by requiring the office to estimate its expenses for each biennium and charge state agencies an assessment to cover those costs. These assessments will provide a new revenue source for the Public Records Advocate Fund and ensure the office can further its mission of making the public records system more accessible and efficient.

Bolstering the fiscal viability of the Public Records Advocate office furthers the essential public policy goal of government transparency. The public records system is not easily accessible to many Oregonians, and the costs public bodies charge to requestors can include attorney expenses, leading some requests to cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars to process. Oregon public records law sets disclosure as the assumption, rather than the exception, but procedural and economic barriers at times undermines this statutory directive.

The Public Records Advocate office has done much to resolve some of these barriers by educating public bodies in how to respond to requests and serving as a mediator to resolve matters that may otherwise result in expensive and time-consuming adversary proceedings. This bill, which already has bicameral and bipartisan support, ensures the ongoing success of the Public Records Advocate Office and furthers the public's interest in government accountability.

For these reasons, I urge this committee to support Senate Bill 510. Thank you.