

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMMISSION  
STATEMENT ON HB 5030  
AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN ELECTRONIC CITIZEN'S FORUM**

This bill, proposed by the Governor, establishes an electronic Citizen's Forum for the purpose of receiving suggestions from citizens regarding ways to improve the services of state government.

While the Freedom of Information (FOI) Commission supports the goal of this proposal – to facilitate public participation in the way state government operates – the FOI Commission is submitting testimony today to question why submittals to this electronic forum would not be disclosable under the FOI Act.

The legislation already permits a citizen to file a suggestion anonymously. Thus, why is the prohibition on the disclosure of the entire submittal necessary? The anonymity option would seem to remove the need for secrecy, as anyone who feels that they would not want to be identified for whatever reason is already protected.

There is no demonstrated reason why submittals to the forum should not be subject to disclosure under the FOI Act.

Moreover, there is a strong public policy argument in favor of the availability of the submittals as to their substance. The availability of the submittals could help to determine which aspects of state government are eliciting the most comment. The examination of areas that receive greater comment than others could warrant further review and ultimately result in improved service delivery. Additionally, members of the public have an interest in learning what areas of government are generating input and suggestions from their fellow citizens.

The Commission recommends the removal of the ban on disclosure of suggestions submitted to the forum. This important information should be available to the public.

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