

January 30, 2009

Testimony to Government Administration & Elections
SB-772 An Act Concerning the Freedom of Information Act.
Public Hearing 2-2-09

Dear GAE Representatives and Senators,

My name is Diane Cece. I reside at 37 Olmstead Place, Norwalk. I wish to present my opinion regarding proposed changes to the Freedom of Information Act, specifically those recommended in SB-772.

This bill recommends revising legislation that became effective Oct. 1, 2008 and requires municipalities with existing websites to timely post their meeting agendas and minutes. The new legislation would provide an additional year to comply (10-1-09) and would waive compliance entirely if a municipality could prove hardship under FOI regulations.

First, let me say that similar measures being considered to alleviate compliance hardships are unacceptable. Even under the most dire of economic circumstances, one would expect that a community with a government website would be able to download documents in a timely fashion. The issue at hand is only whether to exempt certain cities and towns, and whether to extend the compliance deadline.

For the sake of public citizens, community activists, the local press and other stakeholders, I would rather see the extended deadline only pushed to July 1, 2009. Considering municipalities have already had over 6 months to prepare to comply, a new compliance date of October 2009 seems overly generous. Remember that with every month the requirements are delayed, citizens and others must obtain public documents either in person at their local city/town hall or via US Postal Service. In this day and age of instant information and lightening-speed communications, it is archaic for residents in CT to have to drive to city hall for meeting notices, agendas and minutes.

While I strongly believe that every municipality with a current website should have been prepared to comply on 10-1-08, I do understand the nature of such changes at the local government level. Therefore, I believe that SB-772 is the most equitable solution in that it still requires 100% compliance unless granted relief from the FOI commission. I would ask that any municipality receiving a "hardship waiver" be required to reapply for that waiver every 12 months.

I urge you to consider amending this proposed bill to require compliance by July 1, 2009. In the absence of that possibility, I support the passage of SB-772 as presented. In conclusion, let me quote President James Madison: "A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power that knowledge gives." I would add "citizens wishing to be informed should be able to do so in the most efficient & timely manner possible."

Thank you for *your* time, and for your consideration of this matter.

Respectfully,

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