

Government Administration and Elections

Public Hearing

Bill # 772, LCO #2607

An Act Concerning the Freedom of Information

To revise the requirement that minutes from a public agency's sessions be posted on such agency's web site within seven days of such session

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Testimony of:

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The \$20,000,000 solution CTMinuteMan.com

This bill hopes to placate some town officials and legislators by delaying the progress of the original FOI bill, but ironically it may have created the potential to reward the state and municipal agencies with windfall savings and benefits valued at \$20+ Mil.

I can speak about this bill from personal experience. I own an alternative to the Rocky Hill town site, myrockyhill.com, to which I have been posting meeting agendas and minutes for some fifteen committees since 2001.

I created and have maintained the site for the benefit of local residents. This site has received over 300,000 hits. Registration to the site is required, or that number would've exceeded 1 million. Over the past eight years, some 11,000 articles and documents have been published on that site. I can assure you that fulfilling an individual document request takes far longer than the 15 seconds required to upload each document to the web site.

Shakespeare might simply characterize this bill with the quotes:

It's "Much Ado About Nothing" and "Methinks thou doth protest too much!"

Removing a town web site rather than comply, pretty much says it all.

And, as my mom used to tell me, son, don't cut off your nose to spite your face."

My thoughts:

- Every year we should advance the cause of FOI, not delay it. This bill is an impediment to progress. And, for what reason? Does it really serve *the* people?
- Truism: Municipalities will resist most efforts at forced modernization, and are here only considering the superficial and short-range impact on employees' time. They do not consider the big picture. We all carry our Blackberries and laptops. Why are the towns not keeping pace! Very simply, a few are holding back the progress of the many and government is helping them!
- This bill actually speeds the flow of information, reduces costs and saves both employee and citizen time and labor.
 - As an example – assume only ten requests are made a month for minutes copies going back as far as a year. How much time would be required to research and email the same files when compared to time to have uploaded the ten files when they were created?

- The agencies have already had adequate time to prepare to implement the requirements of this bill; extending this will only delay the inevitable. It's only their mindset which has to be adjusted.
- This bill may be politically expedient to get the municipalities off the back of legislators, but it does not serve the citizens. How many taxpayers do you know who've complained about this bill!
- This is a requirement whose time has come. It should not have to be mandated. Government is and should be reaching out, where possible, to use the Internet in order to save time, labor and cost.

This being said:

- We can offer what we believe is a solution whose value would exceed \$20 Mil in benefit to state, municipal and educational agencies, and with potential benefit to the entire state in ways beyond its simple FOI intended application.
- To facilitate the transition to a statewide system of document storage and retrieval we will **DONATE** standardized Web 2.0 web sites, free of charge to any government agency, institution, school, or municipality in order to assist them in implementing this requirement.
- These web sites will standardize and centralize web communication across the state, while permitting flexibility and retaining agency individuality.
- These sites are built on open source code which has been implemented on some 200,000 site installations around the globe since 2000, and have recorded site hits in the billions.
- These sites will increase the capability of any entity to post not only any documents such as agendas and minutes in seconds, but also news, calendars, and multimedia such as videos, photos. Capability exists for citizen forums and blogs, chats, forms downloading, document sharing, and most any popular web application you could envision.
- A site has been set up at www.myrockyhillps.com to demonstrate an educational application. (town site www.rockyhillps.com) The site's not yet fully populated with content, but has been set up with menu items to display site capabilities. Another demo site is being created at www.ctminuteman.com. The latter site will be capable of serving all towns, from one location for purposes of minutes, news and calendar management. It took 30 seconds to post the content of this testimony to the sites home page.
- Entire sites can be installed in a matter of hours, They can be customized with free or inexpensive templates and add-ons. A novice can begin uploading documents in minutes. These sites are easy for inexperienced administrators to maintain, and are pretty much bullet-proof thanks to years of testing.
- We will train, install and service to suit individual needs.

What's in it for us? Everyone volunteers in their own way.
Why do we offer this? Because we can!

Thank you for your consideration,
Scott Coleman
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Note: The "FOI Manager" web site concept was originally proposed to FOI officials February 15th 2006.