

Claude Albert, Legislative Chair, Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

In Opposition to House Bill No. 5278, an Act Concerning Senior Centers and the Freedom of Information Act

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

Senator Prague, Representative Serra and members of the Select Committee on Aging:

My name is Claude Albert. I live in Haddam, and I am the legislative chair of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information. I am here today on behalf of CCFOI to question the need to create this additional exemption from the Freedom of Information Act.

Our understanding is that this bill is intended to protect senior citizens from unscrupulous solicitors by denying access to the names and addresses of members of senior centers and participants in senior programs.

We share the proponents' repugnance for predatory practices against senior citizens. But we would question how effective the proposed exemption would be in preventing those practices, since lists of "marketing prospects" can be gathered from myriad sources of public and private information. We also wonder whether, as an unintended byproduct, this exemption might deny seniors more welcome and helpful contacts from legitimate local businesses, government or other community organizations.

It is always possible to postulate a way in which those so inclined can misuse almost any public information. But the information that is the subject of this bill has been public for many years. Before creating yet another category of public information that is not public, we would ask the committee to establish that its availability has created a track record of serious problems, that these problems cannot be addressed in some other way and that this change will be effective in dealing with them.

We believe exemptions to the Freedom of Information Act should not be created lightly but only when they effectively deter a real and risk that clearly outweighs the value of openness.