

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMMISSION STATEMENT ON  
HOUSE BILL 5176, AN ACT PROTECTING MUNICIPAL  
POLICE OFFICERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

**February 26, 2018**

The Freedom of Information Commission urges the rejection of House Bill 5176.

House Bill 5176 proposes to withhold from public disclosure the voter registration information (*e.g.*, date of birth, address) of any elector who (1) resides in the same dwelling unit as any sworn member of a municipal police department who is a bona fide resident of the town served by such officer, and (2) has the same last name of such officer. The stated purpose is to prohibit the disclosure of such information that may place municipal police officers or their families at risk.

Currently, Title 9 of the general statutes is rife with provisions that explicitly mandate public access - provisions that have been law for decades. The Commission submits that this is because the legislature has long recognized that voting is a sacred right which must be zealously protected. The best disinfectant is transparency, which has been the hallmark of voter registration records over the years.

There are two general reasons why transparency in the area of voter information is important. The first reason is because transparency is meant to deter voter fraud and provide a means to detect it. The second reason for transparency is to ensure that registration and election officials, who are charged with entering, updating and maintaining voter data, are accountable and carry out their roles in accordance with the law. Accessibility to this information ought to assuage concerns about voter fraud and provide confidence in the voting system itself.

House Bill 5947 would undermine and undo at least a portion of a carefully crafted 2012 compromise legislation, which sought to ensure transparency of voter records, grand lists, and land records, and which passed the General Assembly nearly unanimously. In March 2012, the General Assembly limited Section 1-217 of the FOI Act (Public Act 12-3), and basically eliminated the idea of suppressing any address on a voter registration list. This was done in recognition of the reality that a complete prohibition on disclosure of certain residential addresses is unworkable, impossible and ignores the public policy behind numerous provisions within Title 9 that require the disclosure of residential addresses. That bill became law through the cooperative efforts of the Legislature and a 19-organization and agency coalition that included the Secretary of the State's office, among others.

The Commission asks the committee to carefully consider the consequences of this proposed change. The FOI Commission has advocated for a deliberative approach when it comes to making changes to the accessibility of voter information. We would be happy to work with the Committee on this legislation.

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