



Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

The Honorable Mae Flexer, Senate Chair
The Honorable Daniel Fox, House Chair
The Honorable Rob Sampson, Senate Ranking Member
The Honorable Gale Mastrofrancesco, House Ranking Member
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Hartford, CT 06106

March 10, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Flexer, Chairman Fox, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco and Honorable members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Mike Savino and I am president of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information. CCFOI has advocated for government transparency and accountability since our founding in 1955, and I am here today to testify on House Bill 5011 – An Act Concerning The Copying of Public Records Under the Freedom of Information Act.

CCFOI strongly supports House Bill 5011 and urges its passage. This bill would reduce the fee for copies of all public documents other than land records to 15 cents per page – an amount that still exceeds the price at a commercial, for-profit copy shop, but which represents a fair compromise that will remove barriers to transparency and make government more accessible to citizens.

A great many government services include a fee schedule, but we have collectively decided that the foundational services of a democratic and caring society are a shared expense, provided in the public good at no charge. There is no cash box at the entrance of a public high school, no bill is prepared after firefighters extinguish a house fire, no charge to call 911 or use a library card.

Government transparency and accountability are likewise at the heart of our democracy. And there cannot be government accountability without barrier-free access to the records of government. While an even lower copying fee – or no fee -- would be ideal, we support this proposal designed to bring the price of copies closer to the actual cost to agencies of providing copies.

The bill also prohibits agencies from charging a fee to make images of records with a cell phone or handheld scanner – again with the exception of land records. CCFOI wholeheartedly endorses this section of the bill. Agencies incur no costs when members of the public snap a photo of a public record – any more than agencies do when the public looks at a record, or jots down the content of a record (or, for that matter, takes a photograph of a government building). Clarifying that no fee can be charged for taking pictures of records is the right thing to do.

The bill does exempt land records from the 15-cent fee and permits agencies to charge a daily fee of up to \$20 to use a camera or scanner to capture images of land records. As part of a bill that significantly improves access to government records, this is a compromise CCFOI can accept.

Accordingly, we strongly urge passage of House Bill 5011.

Mike Savino
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