

Testimony on 5/10/21 before the
Government Administration and Elections Committee on 5/10/21

To Chairs Representative Fox and Senator Flexer, Vice-Chairs Representative Thomas and Senator Haskell and ranking members Representative Mastrofrancesco and Senator Sampson.

I'm Representative Mike Winkler. First, I'd like to say I'm deeply appreciative of the work this Committee does.

I'm here today to speak in favor of H.B. No. 5011 An Act Concerning the Copying of Public Records Under the Freedom of Information Act.

This bill looks quite different than when it started four years ago. This bill has a significant number of compromises to protect the most important interests expressed by the towns.

The bill now maintains the \$20 per day charge for copying land records using a hand-held scanner, which, by definition, will now include a cell phone or camera. Maintaining the \$20 per day charge was an important goal for the towns and a major source of their FOI revenue.

The bill would allow Connecticut's citizens to take pictures of public documents with their cell phones or cameras. Currently, the statute says you can only use a hand-held scanner, which actually touches the paper and is ill-advised. Taking a picture is much faster for everyone involved and eliminates contact with the record, which I know the Town Clerks will appreciate because it is their responsibility to maintain the records.

The bill reduces the charge for copies to 15 cents a page. No town puts on additional staff or works overtime to fill FOI requests. They already have a building and a copy machine. Therefore, 15 cents per page is sufficient and insures that our constituents can afford government documents.

The FOI statute is intended to guarantee access to records by our constituents.

I am grateful that this Committee raised this bill despite the challenges posed by legislating in the time of COVID.