Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information

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SB 492, AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES

Committee on Government Administration and Elections

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon Sen. Flexer, Rep. Blumenthal, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco and Honorable Members of the Committee on Government Administration and Elections:

My name is Jodie Gil, and I am a member of the board of directors of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information (CCFOI). We are a 70-year-old organization comprised of CT news media outlets and First Amendment supporters. Our mission is to advocate and promote government transparency, public access, a strong Freedom of Information law and other measures that guarantee the rights of individuals and journalists under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the state Constitution.

CCFOI opposes SB 492, which adds several new groups to the growing list of those whose residential addresses are exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Many public servants have legitimate concerns about safety in a climate of increasing political violence in this country. Some have been harassed, attacked and even killed at home. This is not OK. But while it feels necessary to try to do something about that problem, exempting home addresses from release on public documents does not fully protect people, and can make it harder to hold public servants accountable.

Particularly concerning is that this proposal exempts elected officials for whom residency is a requirement to run for office. Here are just some recent examples where this requirement has become an important part of the public dialogue heading into elections:

- A complaint has been filed against a candidate for U.S. Senate seat in North Carolina for allegedly living out of state. Her address of record is a UPS store in North Carolina, but she voted last year in Florida. (WRAL News/ CBS 17)
- News reporting revealed that four candidates for a state house race in Wisconsin had recently listed their primary voting address as outside the district, with two listing their address as outside the state. (Wisconsin Public Radio)
- Voters in Virginia filed complaints over a candidate for a local school board moving into the district in order to be able to run for office (Fredericksburg Free Press), as well as against a House candidate who recently moved into the district (Virginia Mercury).

The residency of candidates is important information for voters even when it's not a requirement for serving. While there is no district requirement to run for Congress, many news outlets report when candidates live in different parts of the state than the districts they hope to represent, to give voters context before heading to the polls. Recent

examples include an Arizona special election (Arizona Luminaria) and the race for the 48th district in California (Voice of San Diego). In 2017, President Donald J. Trump even highlighted one such candidate in Georgia, prompting the Washington Post to publish a story about 21 other representatives who lived outside their districts (Washington Post).

While the current proposal applies to Connecticut officials who are already elected, it would theoretically shield incumbents from review. Candidates for statewide office often start on elected municipal boards, meaning their information would be private under this bill.

Home addresses also help the public hold officials accountable to the laws they implement and oversee. One example: In Connecticut, officials have come under fire for car tax avoidance, information that came to light through reporting on public records tied to home addresses. In 2024, a Bridgeport city councilman was called out for registering his car in nearby Shelton, which has a much lower tax rate. (Connecticut Post) In 2012, my own reporting revealed that some Ansonia officials were not paying car taxes at all, but were receiving tax clearance notices from the city's tax collector in order to keep registering their cars. (Valley Independent Sentinel) While car tax scofflaws are a common challenge for municipalities, removing elected officials from home address disclosure means we would only be able to hold average citizens accountable, not public servants.

Other proposals before this legislature include exempting teachers (SB325) and "any other employee of a public agency" (HB 5548). Whose home address is left? If home addresses are so dangerous, why are we protecting only those in positions of authority? Why not remove the data point from every public record and stop collecting it altogether?

The reason: home addresses serve the valuable public needs of tracking property and taxes, confirming residency requirements for elections, and verifying identifications.

Journalists routinely use this data point in public service reporting. In a survey I conducted in 2023 of journalists who use FOI in their work, the top uses for home addresses in reporting included fact checking identities, locating sources, and telling location-based stories. More than 85% of the journalists reported using home addresses in routine fact checking of identities. In Louisiana, for example, if a Mike Johnson is arrested, the address will very much help journalists identify if that's U.S. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, the Speaker Pro Tempore of the Louisiana State Legislature Mike Johnson, or just your regular old Mike Johnson. One reporter surveyed was able to track campaign finance contributions coming from a single address to identify bundling of donations to a single candidate. Another outlined the geographic diversity of an at-large board of education in her state, which had concentrations in one neighborhood. Another interviewed homeowners who had bought HUD properties in flood zones. Because most journalists are not publishing these addresses, this important work happens in the background and is not always apparent to the public.

Removing access to home addresses on public records could limit one, but not all, of the avenues to access that information, providing a false sense of security. Meanwhile, other approaches to this problem – such as applying an existing safety and security exemption, strengthening harassment laws and increasing penalties for offenses against public officials – could provide more protection. Those alternate approaches should be employed before closing off more information to the public.

Respectfully,

Jodie Gil