

Sunshine in Government Initiative

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SGI Applauds Senate Passage of FOIA Reform

The ten media organizations comprising the Sunshine in Government Initiative (SGI) applaud Senate passage of bipartisan, common sense reforms to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

"The Senate has voted to give the public a better system to ensure our government is open and accountable," said Rick Blum, coordinator of the Sunshine in Government Initiative. "This is a strong statement that openness is vital to American democracy. This bill creates an independent ombudsman to resolve citizen disputes and help agencies strengthen FOIA. It will help the public hold agencies accountable for avoiding openness."

SGI would like to express appreciation to Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and John Cornyn (R-TX), their staffs and Senate leaders for working so hard and diligently to ensure this popular bill creates meaningful fixes to the broken FOIA system.

The Openness Promotes Effectiveness in our National Government Act, or OPEN Government Act (S. 849), makes simple, common sense reforms to the way federal agencies process requests for documents under FOIA. Among its improvements, the legislation:

- Creates a tracking system and hotline for requesters
- Restores meaningful deadlines for agency action and imposes real consequences on federal agencies for missing statutory deadlines
- Creates an ombudsman to help requesters use FOIA and avoid and resolve disputes
- Makes it easier for the public to recover legal fees when requesters must sue for records

The House already approved nearly identical legislation (H.R. 1309) by an overwhelming vote of 308-117.

The Sunshine in Government Initiative is a coalition of ten media groups promoting open and accountable government. For more information, visit www.sunshineingovernment.org.

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