

# Sunshine in Government Initiative

1156 15<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 1250  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone (202) 795-9305

sunshineingovernment.org  
info@sunshineingovernment.org  
@sunshineingov



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January 11, 2016

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elijah Cummings  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
2471 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings,

The media associations in the Sunshine in Government Initiative are writing to express our support for good government legislation expected to come up for a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). H.R. 653 constitutes the most important legislation to strengthen and secure open government in a decade.

We continue to share your commitment to making FOIA reform legislation as strong as possible. Your work through hearings and oversight brought to light important shortcomings in the administration of FOIA and clearly showed that only an act of Congress can address many of FOIA's worse woes.

By strengthening the independence of the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS), the legislation ensures OGIS can speak with the independent voice that Congress intended. By writing into law the presumption of openness – a starting point that many of us firmly believe already exists in FOIA – while preserving important protections for personal privacy, national security and other interests, the legislation, if enacted, would ensure agencies follow this policy in future administrations, no matter who occupies the White House. By requiring the government to create a consolidated portal to help agencies and requesters alike better track FOIA requests and responses, the legislation pushes agencies to use existing technology to make tracking FOIA requests like tracking packages when we shop online. Other provisions push the executive branch to better manage the administration of FOIA and improve accountability.

In sum, this legislation takes several important meaningful steps to address long-standing obstacles that requesters, including the media, face when using FOIA.

We applaud your bipartisan efforts on this legislation and look forward to quick enactment. We commit to working with you closely as the Senate considers similar legislation and helping ensure these important steps become law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Blum".

Rick Blum  
Director

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American Society of News Editors ♦ The Associated Press  
Association of Alternative Newsmedia ♦ National Newspaper Association  
Newspaper Association of America ♦ Online News Association  
Radio Television Digital News Association ♦ Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press  
Society of Professional Journalists