

Sunshine in Government Initiative

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February 24, 2014

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

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

Dear Mr. Chairman Issa and Ranking Member Cummings,

The Sunshine in Government Initiative, a coalition of nine media associations promoting open government policies and practices, is writing in support of H.R. 1211, the FOIA Oversight and Implementation Act of 2014.

In the nearly half century since Congress enacted the original Freedom of Information Act in 1966, the public has rightly learned important things uncovered despite government reluctance or embarrassment. To this day, FOIA remains a powerful tool for the media and others to learn uncomfortable truths, such as the human cost of technical problems with military jets, crime aboard cruise ships and disproportionate rates of overdoses among veterans, just to name a few of the nearly 700 stories we have catalogued that rely on FOIA. At the same time, FOIA suffers as requesters wait for responses, agencies use outdated technology, and the public has little way to hold government accountable for fixing FOIA's longstanding problems.

The provisions in H.R. 1211 push agencies to improve their FOIA operations. In particular, we strongly support efforts to strengthen the voice of the Office of Government Information Services, to make FOIA more efficient by creating a single system for the public to ask for information from any participating agency, to bring experts together to find solutions to FOIA's most vexing problems, and to bring greater transparency to agency efforts to meet their obligations currently in law.

We applaud the sponsors of this bipartisan legislation for putting together commonsense improvements to what is arguably the government's more important transparency law. We look forward to continuing to work with you and others to strengthen FOIA and the way agencies meet their obligations under the law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Blum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Rick Blum
Director