



December 2, 2014

Dear Senator,

The Project On Government Oversight is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. POGO's investigations into corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government. As such, we are writing to urge you to sign on as a cosponsor to S. 2520, the FOIA Improvement Act of 2014, a bipartisan bill introduced earlier this year by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Senator John Cornyn (R-TX). S. 2520 includes commonsense reforms that will help make federal agencies more open and accountable to the public. This bill, which unanimously passed the Senate Judiciary Committee, would bring many necessary and positive changes to this significant law.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a critical tool for helping the public understand what the federal government is doing and why. It requires federal agencies to release any requested information that is not exempt, and requires agencies to make basic information about their policies available. FOIA is a tool commonly used by researchers, historians, journalists, and the public to discover information about possible environmental contamination near their property, the safety of consumer products, and more.

The FOIA Improvement Act codifies the presumption of openness when agencies are using their discretion in deciding whether to release information in response to a FOIA request, and will narrow the now broadly overused exemption 5 by creating a 25-year limit on withholding pre-decisional agency documents. It will also address many of the inefficiencies in the current FOIA process by encouraging proactive disclosures of frequently requested documents and clarifying when agencies can and cannot charge fees when they exceed statutory deadlines. The bill will also give the FOIA ombudsman, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS), greater independence and require that agencies notify requestors regarding the availability of alternative dispute resolution options through OGIS, in lieu of litigation.

This bill has a great chance of passing the House before the end of this Congress. More than 75 organizations from across the ideological spectrum and working on a broad variety of issue areas support S. 2520. This strong show of support is indicative of the importance of FOIA to the public, and the strengths of the reforms in the bill.

We encourage you to cosponsor this important piece of legislation. To speak further about these issues, please contact Liz Hempowicz at [ehempowicz@pogo.org](mailto:ehempowicz@pogo.org) or (202) 347-1122.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danielle Brian".

Danielle Brian  
Executive Director