

*Town of Westerly
Rhode Island*

OFFICE OF THE TOWN CLERK
Mary L. LeBlanc, MMC, Town Clerk



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April 22, 2025

The Honorable Representative Evan P. Shanley
Chair, House State Government & Elections
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Support of Proposed Legislation 2025 H 5457

Dear Chairman Shanley and Members of the Committee:

As a Town Clerk, I am writing to express my support of 2025 H 5457 – An Act Relating to Public Records – Access to Public Records.

The proposed legislation regarding Access to Public Records Act ("APRA") requests would increase the hourly costs for a search and retrieval from fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per hour and no costs for the first hour of search or retrieval to twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) per hour with no cost for the first hour of search and retrieval and would require that the requester pay any outstanding balance owed for prior records requests before a new request will be processed.

The number of APRA requests has increased dramatically. During the last month alone, the Town of Westerly received twenty-six (26) APRA requests. While I understand the need for transparency, some requests can be frivolous. For example, the Town received an APRA request to search all emails for a period of one year containing the word "pineapple." The requester had submitted correspondence over a period of time and had hidden the word in various communication. This was truly a disregard of the time and effort of a public body to process the APRA request. I feel that an increase in the cost for search and retrieval time may deter these types of meaningless requests.

There are statutory mandates and procedures that the Town must adhere to in responding to an APRA request. As the Public Records Officer for the Town, I am required to attend annual training by the attorney general's office. All communications by the Town in response to an APRA request must be made in writing, whether via regular mail or electronic mail, to ensure compliance with the statutory mandates and allows the Town to maintain written evidence of all of its communications with the requesting party. I feel that the requested increase in cost after the first hour of search and retrieval would support the time and effort of the public body with processing the numerous APRA requests, some from professionals using this mechanism for records requests rather than doing the research themselves.

I respectfully urge you to consider passage of House Bill H 5457 because of the time and research involved for a search and retrieval of requested documents and for requests that remain unpaid and unclaimed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mary L. LeBlanc, MMC
Town Clerk and Public Records Officer

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