



Director's Office

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Jonathan Womer, Director

April 22, 2025

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Chairperson
House Committee on State Government & Elections
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill No. 5877 – An Act Relating to Public Records – Access to Public Records

Dear Chairperson Shanley,

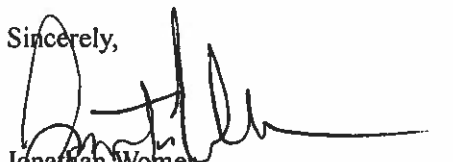
Thank you for providing the Department of Administration with the opportunity to submit comments in response to House Bill No. 5877, which would require public records stored in a computer system to be provided at no charge. This bill would apply to both the State of Rhode Island ("State") and municipal government.

The Rhode Island Access to Public Records Act ("APRA") allows for a \$15 dollar per hour charge for search and retrieval of records, with the first hour free. This cost structure has been in place for decades. While government has migrated vast numbers of paper records into an electronic format, search and retrieval of electronic records is still a daunting task due to volume. Additionally, many of the records stored electronically involve confidential information, which requires a time-consuming legal review, and redaction as necessary, to protect the information of our citizens.

Removing the charges for providing electronically-stored records would eliminate the incentive for a requestor to narrow their request to something reasonable. State and municipal government would be overwhelmed with overly broad requests for electronic records, including requests that may involve hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of emails.

The current APRA cost structure, with the first hour free and a low hourly cost, strikes a delicate balance between government transparency and the efficient allocation of State and local government resources. Respectfully, we believe passage of this legislation would upset this balance.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Womer
Director, Department of Administration

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections
The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Steven Sepe, Committee Clerk