



Rhode Island Department of Human Services
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Office of the Director
Kimberly Merolla-Brito

April 22, 2025

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

RE: House Bill 5877 – An Act Relating to Public Records – Access to Public Records

Dear Chair Shanley,

I am writing to express opposition to House Bill 5877, a proposal concerning public access to records that would allow, upon request, for public records to be shared at no charge. While the proposal seeks to make public records more accessible, I am sharing additional context regarding APRA requests received by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) for the committee's consideration.

It is important to know a majority of the public records requests received by DHS, from members of the public, assert that fees should not apply because the requests are "in the public interest." While this may hold true for many requests, DHS like other State agencies rely on fees to discourage excessively broad or repetitive requests. Requests that are voluminous require significant organizational resources that take personnel away from critical duties, which negatively impacts the administration of core public assistance programs. Importantly, R.I.G.L §38-2-4(e) already provides a framework to help ensure a balanced and fair approach to settle fees, if assessed.

While we appreciate your attention to this important matter, we respectfully request the proposal be viewed holistically with regard to its impact on operational integrity, limited public resources, and current solutions available.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy