



**RHODE ISLAND LEAGUE
OF CITIES AND TOWNS**

*Distinctive Communities
Powerful Alliance*

March 19, 2024

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Chairman House State Government & Elections Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St.
Providence RI, 02903

RE: Bill Number: 7181 Relating to PUBLIC RECORDS -- ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS

Dear Chairman Shanley and Honorable Members of the State Government & Elections Committee:

I am writing to express our concerns with House Bill 7181, which proposes various changes to the access to public records act. We appreciate the sponsor's effort to improve transparency and accountability within our government, however the RI League of Cities and Towns feels there are certain aspects of the bill that warrant further consideration.

Firstly, we understand the importance of transparency, but have reservations about the provision mandating the release of all internal investigations, irrespective of their findings. While transparency is essential, the League along with the RI Police Chiefs' Association worries that this broad approach could potentially expose individuals involved in minor infractions to undue scrutiny and tarnish their reputations unfairly. We would suggest that more discretion be exercised in determining which internal investigations should be made public, particularly those involving allegations of excessive force or integrity breaches.

Additionally, concerns about the proposed increase in fines for public officials found in violation of the access to public records act for failure to comply with a request to inspect and/or copy public records, especially if that city or town does not have a designated public records officer. A civil fine for public officials who knowingly violate this chapter would increase from two thousand dollars (\$2,000) to four thousand dollars (\$4,000), and if a public official recklessly violates this chapter a fine of two thousand dollars (\$2,000) this is a change from one thousand dollars (\$1,000) previously.

In conclusion, while we share the goal of improving transparency and accountability in our government, it is essential to proceed with caution and sensitivity to the potential impacts of these legislative changes. I respectfully urge you to reconsider certain provisions of House Bill 7181 to ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are adequately balanced.

On behalf of the League of Cities and Towns thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express our views.

Sincerely,

David M. Bodah
Associate Director

Cc: State Government & Elections Committee
Ernie Almonte, Executive Director, RILCT