

Jan. 22, 2015

Vermont House Committee on Government Operations
Room 49
115 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Committee Members:

I regret that I cannot attend the hearing Jan. 23 on H.18, but hope the committee will accept my written comments on behalf of the Vermont Press Association.

The Vermont Press Association supports H.18 as another step toward strengthening and clarifying the state Public Records Act. In particular, we strongly endorse these aspects of the bill:

- Having the Legislative Council compile a complete list of exemptions in the statutes by December of this year, with a requirement for updates every two years.
- Standardizing the language within the law.
- Relying on statutory definitions to ensure consistency.
- Establishing a balancing test for competing rights, rather than trying to anticipate every conceivable circumstance that might apply to a public records request.

Thanks also to the committee for its companion bill to require that every rule involving a new exemption to the Public Records Act be subject to committee review.

We recognize that the committee had an enormous assignment in reviewing all exemptions in the Public Records Act, and we understand that this will be a continuing process. We salute the committee's efforts to date.

Thank you.

Tom Kearney
Managing editor
Stowe Reporter and Waterbury Record