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Editorial: Public records proposal fixes old flaws

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The Oregon Legislature created the office of Public Records Advocate in 2017, and Ginger McCall was appointed to the post in January 2018 by Oregon Governor Kate Brown. **One year and nine months later, McCall was gone**, having resigned in protest over interference from some on Brown's staff.

Now lawmakers, with the advantage of hindsight, are doing what they should have done in the beginning. They're proposing changes in the current law that will give the Public Records Advocate and Public Records Advisory Council the

independence they need.

Members of the state Senate's Interim Committee on General Government and Emergency Preparedness will get its first formal look at the draft legislation when it meets Monday.

All in all, what's being proposed fixes most of the flaws that McCall's departure exposed. The Public Records Advocate will be independent, appointed by the Public Records Advisory Council and subject to hiring and firing only by the council.

Too, the council itself will have the right to support or oppose legislation as well as to ask lawmakers to introduce legislation for it.

That's particularly important. In her resignation letter to the governor, McCall said she had been pressured by members of the governor's staff to represent the governor's interests, even when they conflicted with those of the advocate and the council. Worse, she was told not to tell anyone about the request.

The proposed changes would make it clear to all that the advocate and the council are, in fact, independent, not answerable to the governor or any other elected official.

One problem still remains in the law, however, and lawmakers should address it in the proposed legislation. Of the 14 members of the Public Records Advisory Council, nine represent government agencies or public employees' labor unions;

three are journalists and one is a member of the public. At the very least, the council should have as many members of the press and public as it does of government.