

To: The Senate Committee On General Government and Emergency Preparedness
Senator Senator Chuck Riley, Chair

From: Emily Harris, member, Public Records Advisory Council

Dear Senators,

I write as a member of the Public Records Advisory Council, created by the Legislature, beginning with this Committee, as part of a needed update to Oregon's public records charge. This was a welcome move by the many Oregonians supportive of accessible and responsive government. Thank you for that.

SB 1506 is a simple but necessary update, establishing the office of the Public Records Advocate as an independent body in the executive branch. I support SB 1506 for a number of important reasons, listed below.

- **The Public Records Advisory Council endorsed SB 1506 unanimously save one vote.** The PRAC, as you know, is a well-crafted mix, per statute, of parties directly interested in public records: Three working members of the media, four members of the state Executive branch, three representatives of local government, one representative of the public sector workforce, one member of the public, one Oregon Representative and one Oregon Senator.
- SB 1506 expands the public accountability of the Public Records Advocate by placing the hiring decision in the hands of the PRAC, which includes two members directly elected by the public, representatives of two publicly elected members, and eight members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.
- SB 1506 removes political pressure or the appearance of political pressure on the Advocate, by taking the decision on the Advocate's employment out of the hands of the Governor alone. There are many examples of leaders expressing great interest in the release of particular public records; subsequently many opportunities to seek to influence the Advocate.

- **If the job of advocate is structured correctly, as an independent office Oregon public records statutes the person filling it will be able to advance the *common interests* of Oregonians who request public records, and Oregonians who respond to those requests. *Public records are not a zero sum game.***
- The PRAC's work ahead includes many issues important to Oregonians. We need a strong council and independent advocate to move forward.
- **Passing SB 1506 will allow Oregon to attract the best possible candidates for the position of Advocate.** The PRAC chose to delay advertising the position until it is clear what kind of position Oregon is advertising for: an independent advocate charged to work for the interests of all Oregonians, or a politically vulnerable appointee.

I encourage you to pass SB 1506 out of committee promptly.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely yours,

Emily Harris