

Submitter: Shasta Kearns Moore
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1077

Testimony of Shasta Kearns Moore

In Support of SB 1077 – Public Records Fee Reform

June 4, 2025

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 1077, a bill that aims to bring much-needed reform to the way Oregon assesses fees for public records. I serve as the Vice Chair of the Public Records Advisory Council but I am testifying on my own behalf.

As a longtime community journalist, I have dedicated my career to helping the public understand how government operates and how public policies affect everyday families. That work has required persistent effort and personal sacrifice — and unfortunately, it has also meant making hard choices when agencies put a financial barrier between the public and the truth.

In 2015, the Mail Tribune faced a demand of at least \$18,000 from the Jackson County Sheriff's Office for records, primarily to cover attorney fees for redacting personal information. As the legislature fails year after year to pass systemic fee reform, these sorts of practices continue. They are emblematic of a system that often punishes transparency and rewards obstruction. The current public records law in Oregon allows — and even encourages — agencies to inflate costs through vague “actual cost” definitions that increasingly include legal review. That practice turns routine requests into prohibitively expensive endeavors, especially for journalists, students, nonprofit researchers, and everyday citizens trying to understand how decisions are being made on their behalf.

Meanwhile, open government advocates have continued to engage in good faith. SB 1077 is not perfect but begins to rebalance the scales. It recognizes that transparency is not just a right — it is a public good, and it should not be available only to those with deep pockets or legal teams.

At its heart, this bill is about protecting open government. But it's also about preparing for the future. We are on the cusp of a new information era — one where AI tools and commercial requesters will rely on high-quality, publicly available datasets to train systems that will shape journalism, education, public health, and more. Without clear, consistent, and fair access rules, Oregon risks falling behind — not only in technology, but in transparency.

Thank you for your time, and I urge your yes vote on SB 1077.

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