



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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CONTACT: Rick Osborn (503) 986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Speeding up public records release improves transparency

SB 481 puts time limits on how quickly government must comply with requests

SALEM – Public bodies would have a time limit for responding to and filling public records requests – improving government transparency and accountability to the public – under a bill passed today by the Oregon Senate.

Senate Bill 481 – which passed the Senate on a 29-0 vote – requires that public bodies acknowledge public records requests within five days. Then, the body would be required to turn over the requested records – unless they are exempt – within 10 days or sooner after acknowledging the request.

“This is a transparency and government accountability bill that puts a timeframe on how quickly government agencies have to respond to public records requests,” said Sen. Lee Beyer (D-Springfield), who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “It requires a timely response so that our government records are open to the public without unreasonable delays. It also eliminates the tactic of sitting on public records requests for a long period of time to avoid disclosing something. The public should be able to obtain public records and have a clear idea when they might receive those documents, without drawing the process out.”

Currently the law requires public bodies to respond to these requests “as soon as practicable without unreasonable delay.” SB 481 modifies the current public records law timeline to give it specific parameters.

In Oregon, government records are available to the public unless they are exempt from disclosure. Each public body maintains its own records and handles information requests. They are required to have a process, available in writing, for those seeking access to request a copy

of the records, or the opportunity to inspect them. Public bodies can set a fee for staff time and materials to provide records to the public.

Senate Bill 481 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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