

Joint Standing Judiciary Committee

LD 1353: “An Act Regarding Salary Information for Public Employees”

Testimony in Opposition

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Good afternoon Senator Bliss, Representative Priest and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Chris Cinquemani. I am the Public Affairs Director for Maine Leads, an Augusta-based non-partisan citizen group committed to fiscal responsibility and government transparency.

My testimony today is in opposition to LD 1353: “An Act Regarding Salary Information for Public Employees.”

I am hard-pressed to recall a more compelling example of how out-of-touch some members of this legislature truly are. The sponsors of this bill have waged a blatant attack on government transparency in Maine.

The salary information the sponsors of this bill seek to hide belongs to the public. We have a right to know how elected officials are spending our tax dollars. Government and school employees are paid by our money, the money Mainers work hard to earn. These employees work for us. They do not earn a paycheck merely to serve at the pleasure of politicians or to fund political campaigns.

For a period of time in late 2006 and 2007, I was a state employee. When I accepted that job I was comfortable with the public knowing how much of their tax dollars I earned. For the record, during my eight month stint working in the legislature, I made \$29,929.

This information belongs to the citizens and taxpayers of Maine—the very people each legislator swore an oath to serve, and the information has always been available to the public. How can the sponsors of this bill, including the two who sit on this very committee, attempt to blindfold the citizens of Maine?

This assault on open government is doubly alarming because it is proposed by individuals at some of the highest levels of government. This bill has the mark of not just the Assistant Senate Democratic Leader, but that of the President of the Senate and the chairman of this committee. Is this an agenda of secrecy and censorship the public should expect from the leaders of our representative government?

By sponsoring this bill, these legislators have snubbed a nation-wide movement to expand access to government.

On January 21, just one day after being sworn in as president, Barack Obama had this to say:

"The way to make a government responsible is not simply to enlist the services of responsible men and women, or to sign laws that ensure that they never stray. The way to make government responsible is to hold it accountable. And the way to make government accountable is make it transparent so that the American people can know exactly what decisions are being made, how they're being made, and whether their interests are being well served."

While a new president is doubling efforts to make the federal government more open and accessible, Sen. Marrache and the other co-sponsors are taking the opposite approach by hiding public information and closing off government to Mainers.

Rather than working with transparency advocates to expand access to public information, the sponsors have forced us to defend existing policies to protect our right to know.

Government transparency and openness is necessary in a free society. The fact that some politicians seek to destroy this transparency shows just how vital it is. I encourage the committee to stand up for their constituents' right to an open government with a vote of "Ought Not To Pass." You can send a message to the public that this agenda of secrecy will be stopped by responsible officials who will hold themselves accountable to the people of Maine.

Thank you for your time.