



## *Maine Freedom of Information Coalition*

Testimony of Mal Leary, President, MFOIC on LD 1353 4-30-09

Senator Bliss, Representative Priest and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Mal Leary and I appear before you as President of the Maine Freedom of Information Coalition, a state wide group of individuals and organizations united to advocate for openness and transparency in their government. I also serve on the legislature's Right to Know Advisory Committee.

I am a Maine native and well remember my father taking me to the town meeting as the budget for the town was discussed and debated. The salary, down to the penny, was in the annual report for every town employee.

If you look in the archives of our state you will find reports of town meetings going back to our creation as a state in 1820, and some towns have records going back even further. There has always been transparency in our records for what government employees are paid.

In fact, if you read the floor debate from 1959 when the legislature first passed a state public records and open meeting law, the strongest argument against the law was that it was not needed because everybody knew public records are just that, the public's records.

LD 1353 seeks to overturn that long tradition by drawing a veil of secrecy over the fundamental right of Mainers to know how their tax money is being spent. Supporters argue identifying salaries by position is sufficient. We disagree.

How many Vice Presidents are there on a University campus? How many special assistants are there in the Governor's office? As a journalist, I have looked at the pay records of the Governor's staff. They are all classified as special assistants for pay purposes.

Simply identifying by position will not provide the public with the accountability and transparency they have a right to expect, particularly from a state that has a long tradition of the public having a right to know how their money is being spent.

We urge you to reject this legislation as overly broad and not in the long tradition of the public's right to know.

As always, I will try to answer any questions you have.