



Testimony in Opposition to

**LD 1353 - An Act Regarding Salary Information  
for Public Employees**

by

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Good afternoon, Senator Bliss, Representative Priest and members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary.

My name is Tarren Bragdon and I have the honor of serving as chief executive officer of The Maine Heritage Policy Center. The Maine Heritage Policy Center is a non-partisan education and research organization located in Portland. We are dedicated to making Maine's economy more vibrant and Maine families more prosperous by advancing sound public policy solutions based on the principles of limited government, individual liberty and a strong free enterprise system.

I am here in strong opposition to LD 1353 – An Act Regarding Salary Information for Public Employees.

This bill is an effort to use legislative fiat to shut down our MaineOpenGov.org web site, a privately funded site that is a public resource, available at no cost to all users. LD 1353 is a vindictive, heavy-handed attempt to erect an impenetrable wall of government censorship between the public and any meaningful review of how tax dollars are spent in Maine. Passage of this bill would send a chilling message that Maine's government is the most secretive in the country.

MaineOpenGov.org has brought Maine's long and proud tradition of open, transparent government to the masses by taking what has always been public information and making it accessible.

Frankly, I am particularly troubled by the public vindictiveness and juvenile name calling by the sponsor of this bill, Senator Lisa Marrache, of Waterville. In a recent Kennebec Journal opinion editorial, she referred to the visitors to our site, and all open government advocates, as "sleazy and voyeuristic" and accused them of feeding into "witch hunts."

Consider these facts. Since our site went live on September 24, 2008, we have received:

- 96,800 visits to the site
- 417,000 unique searches or page views
- 7,900 hours collectively spent on the site

Of interest, Senator Marrache's constituents in Waterville visited MaineOpenGov.org 1,621 times and collectively spent 164 hours on the site. To put this in perspective, fewer than 7,000 Waterville citizens voted in the State Senate election last November. Are these 1,600 constituents of hers sleazy, voyeuristic or on a witch hunt? I believe they are citizens of Maine who want to exercise their public right to know.

Why am I telling you all of these statistics?

MaineOpenGov.org is a popular public resource for a reason. Clearly the public values open government, and is legitimately interested in how Maine government spends taxpayers' money.

That's a good thing. Open government reduces corruption and makes for more efficient government because more people are reviewing spending and performance.

Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis said it best, "Sunshine is the best disinfectant."

Our system of government has a strong tradition of disclosure:

- Tax assessments and taxes owed, by name, are public to ensure fairness in property tax levies.
- Campaign contributions are disclosed, by name, to ensure that a contributor is not secretly able to buy access and favorable treatment.
- Lobbyist time and expenses are disclosed, by name, to ensure that lobbyists do not use influence to buy government contracts or favorable treatment behind closed doors.
- Non-profits, and soon trade associations, will have to disclose their sources of revenue - even if all privately financed - and salaries of directors, key employees and the highest paid employees, by name, to discourage excessive spending on internal expenses rather than the group's stated mission.
- And governments - from the federal government to the smallest local government - disclose employee salary data, by name, to ensure transparency, equity and competitiveness of public employee salaries.

We must reject censorship. The public has a right to know and this committee has a strong tradition of supporting the Freedom of Access Act.

I strongly urge the committee to unanimously reject LD 1353 and vote Ought Not to Pass. I am happy to answer any questions.