

Government Oversight Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6883

AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN RESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND PROTECTING THE LOCATION OF HOUSING FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Title: AND SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS.

Vote Date: 2/25/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/13/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Oversight Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill will protect United States Attorneys and attorneys employed by the department of Emergency Services and Public Protection as well as individuals housed in shelters for victims of sexual assault from exposure of addresses and other personal information under the Freedom of Information Act. It would block the FOIC from disclosing addresses of such individuals and locations to requests of that nature, and mandates that any meeting where these matters are discussed be held in executive session.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Colleen Murphy, Freedom of Information Commission, Executive Director:

FOIC opposes Sec. 1. because providing special protections to certain classes of employees while not providing them to others may give rise to constitutional questions. FOIC has no objection to the protecting of information indicating the location of a shelter or transitional housing for victims of sexual assault. However, they are concerned about the addition of the following language: "Notwithstanding the provisions of chapter 14, any portion of a meeting of a public agency in which discussions of a shelter or transitional housing for such victims would reveal the location of such shelter or transitional housing shall be held in executive session." While the Commission understands the intent of this proposal, they believe that the proposal may be too broad. There are times when they feel it would hamstring public discussion at local boards and commissions in a way that would become unworkable.

Russell Blair, Freedom of Information Commission, Director of Education and Communications:

Opposes this bill because it could cause issues when it comes to local planning and zoning commissions, specifically when it comes to building new housing for victims of sexual and domestic violence. Under this proposed law, planning and zoning boards and committees would be forced to hold discussions regarding these new developments in executive session, whereas the public has the right to weigh in on these matters.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Liza Andrews, CT Coalition against Domestic Violence, VP of Government and Public Relations:

Supports this bill because it will bring more light to the issues surrounding support of domestic violence and will enable public agencies to take further action to prevent and combat the issue, all in effort to protect victims of domestic violence. CCADV urges the committee to support section two of this bill, which seeks to require public agency meetings discussing housing for domestic or sexual violence victims to hold such discussion in executive session.

Sarah Keitt, State Representative, 134th district:

Supports this bill because sexual violence shelters are given the same protections from FOIA requests as domestic violence shelters. Additionally, the proposal will require that any public agency meeting that discusses the confidential housing described above be held in executive session to ensure that protected information is not publicly disclosed.

Nick Kapoor: Monroe, CT

Supports this bill because it increases protections of victims of sexual and domestic violence. It also provides more support to victims by preventing the disclosure of locations of these shelters. Mr. Kapoor disagrees with the Executive Director of the FOI Commission regarding this bill. It is essential that local boards and commissions do not have the discretion to determine when to enter Executive Session on such matters; it should be mandatory.

Natasha Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate:

Supports this bill because the bill expands the protections of domestic violence shelters and should apply to sexual assault shelters as well. Additionally, she supports the requirement that any public agency meeting that discusses the confidential housing described above be held in executive session to ensure that protected information is not publicly disclosed.

Beth Hamilton, CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Executive Director:

Supports the bill because the safety and privacy of a sexual assault victim go hand in hand, and that many victims go on to face harassment and ongoing threats. Ms. Hamilton feels confidentiality helps survivors rebuild their lives without fear, allowing them to seek medical care, counseling, and legal assistance without the risk of being found by their abuser.

Ed Hawthorne, CT-AFL-CIO, President:

Supports this bill because it adds attorneys employed by the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and U.S. Attorneys for the District of Connecticut to the list of public employees for whom public agencies may not disclose home addresses under the Freedom of Information Act. This bill would provide legal protections to individuals engaging in work that is in the state's interest. Preserving public employees' privacy is essential for their safety, professional integrity, and the overall health of our government.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Michelle Jacklin, Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information, Co-President:

Opposes this bill because it essentially picks and chooses who is exempt from FOIA protections which is contrary to the point. CCOFI does not object to expansion of the nondisclosure law to include the locations of shelters for sexual assault victims, but they take significant issue with the fact that domestic violence shelters may only be discussed during executive sessions. They feel the requirement of an executive session could hinder public participation, especially by land use boards. CCOFI believes that technology has outpaced the law as vast amounts of personal data are accessible on the internet and nearly all personally identifiable information is readily available with a few clicks of a mouse. They believe this bill does nothing more than provide a false sense of security.

Anonymous:

Opposes this bill because it sets a precedent of expansion of FOIA exemptions. This bill also reduces public oversight of housing policy. It also shields members of the government of accountability and public trust.

Reported by: Griffin Olshan, Tom Atwood

Date: 3/6/2025