

**FINAL REPORT
PUBLIC ACCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY LEGISLATION
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

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Summary of Legislative Session:

The 2026 legislative session saw almost two dozen proposals that would have restricted access to important public records. While many of the proposed exemptions to disclosure were introduced in prior years, there were new proposals involving academic records, prison complaints and cannabis enforcement. Fortunately, many of these proposals were defeated, or the Freedom of Information (“FOI”) Commission staff worked with proponents to lessen negative impact of the bills. However, the legislature did act to further restrict access to voter registration information and ballots, the latter in response to a recent Commission decision. Once again there was little legislation passed that would increase access to public records, and for the fifth year in a row, a bill encapsulating recommendations submitted by the FOI Commission to the legislature did not advance. For a more detailed summary of these bills and others of note, please see below:

BILLS PASSED – UNFAVORABLE RESULTS

S.B. 298; P.A. 26-1, AN ACT CONCERNING THE REALLOCATION OF CERTAIN STATE FUNDS AND VARIOUS PROVISIONS RELATING TO EDUCATION, PUBLIC SAFETY, GENERAL GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS, INTERMEDIATE CARE FACILITIES AND WAREHOUSE DISTRIBUTION CENTERS.

Sections 94 and 96 of Senate Bill 298, which legislation was introduced as “emergency certified”, restrict access to ballots and voter registration information.

Section 94 exempts from disclosure “each ballot that has been cast at an election, primary or referendum, including any write-in ballot.” The legislation was in response to a Commission decision, Docket #FIC 2024-0445, Jason LaChapelle v. Bernie Dennier, First Selectman, Board of Selectman, Town of Colchester, et al. (November 19, 2025), which found that while provisions in Title 9 of the General Statutes controlled the public’s access to election ballots, they did not similarly restrict the public’s access to ballots cast in a local budget referendum. The decision in LaChapelle ordered the respondents to disclose sample and in-person ballots cast at the referendum but allowed the public agency to redact any personally identifying information of individual voters.

The Commission submitted testimony in opposition to a similar proposal (Senate Bill 224), which received a public hearing, arguing that access to ballot information can help assuage concerns about voter and election fraud and provide public confidence in the voting system itself.

Section 96 places strict limits on access to voter registration information. Specifically, it limits use of such information to “election-related, scholarly, journalistic, political or governmental purposes” and prohibits use for “any personal, private or commercial purpose” without defining those terms. The Commission objected to this proposal, initially raised in Senate Bill 226, as outlawing specific uses for public information sets a dangerous precedent. The legislation also raised constitutional issues by prohibiting reproduction of information in print, broadcast visual or audio or displayed in any other format. Further, disclosure of a voter’s date of birth is limited to only the year of birth, unless such voter registration information is requested and used for a “state” governmental purpose, as determined by the Secretary of the State, in which case the voter’s complete date of birth would be provided.

Senate Bill 298 passed the Senate and the House and was signed by the Governor.

H.B. 5567; P.A. 26-40, AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTH CARE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION FACILITIES.

House Bill 5567 (Section 1) exempts from disclosure complaints received by the Office of the Correction Ombuds that are not investigated, as well as the decisions by the Correction Ombuds not to investigate those complaints. Such records can only be disclosed with the consent of the person who made the complaint. This new exemption was first introduced in an amendment (to House Bill 5567) and was not subject to a public hearing. The Commission did not have an opportunity to submit testimony but spoke with proponents to try to narrow the exemption.

House Bill 5567 was voted out of the Judiciary Committee before advancing in the House and the Senate, as amended. The Governor has signed the legislation.

BILLS DEFEATED – FAVORABLE RESULTS

H.B. 5548, AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONCERNING EMPLOYEE RESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES AND CERTAIN HIGHER EDUCATION RECORDS.

House Bill 5548 revived two concepts that have been considered by the legislature over the past several years: (1) expansion of the prohibition on disclosure of residential addresses found in §1-217 of the FOI Act and (2) a new exemption for records held by public institutions of higher education “arising out of teaching or research.”

Section 1 of House Bill 5548 sought to expand address confidentiality under §1-217 to “any other employee of a public agency, except when residency is a condition or term of such person’s employment.” The FOI Commission has argued year after year that §1-217 offers very limited protection and should not be viewed as a cure for safety and privacy concerns. Furthermore,

expanding §1-217 to cover all public employees except those with a residency requirement would pose a burden on municipalities who would be responsible for identifying and redacting addresses that can be routinely located on the internet or found in public records that are not covered by §1-217.

Section 2 of House Bill 5548 allowed for the nondisclosure of “records maintained or kept on file by or for the faculty or staff of a public institution of higher education arising out of teaching or research on medical, artistic, scientific, legal or other scholarly issues, including any such records of legal clinics or centers,” but excluding financial records. This concept was previously introduced in the 2023, 2024 and 2025 legislative sessions. In opposing Section 2, the Commission wrote that the proposal would prohibit access to records that are integral to the mission and function of public higher education institutions. The Commission also noted that existing statutes and case law address many of the concerns expressed by supporters of the bill.

House Bill 5548 passed in the Government Administration and Elections Committee but was not called for a vote in the House.

H.B. 5550, AN ACT EXEMPTING COURSE SYLLABI FROM DISCLOSURE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.

House Bill 5550 sought to amend the FOI Act and exempt from disclosure “records created by or for the faculty or staff of a public institution of higher education that consist of course syllabi.” While narrower than the proposed exemption in House Bill 5548 (Section 2), the Commission objected to the bill, noting there is great public interest in what is being taught at taxpayer-funded, public universities. Many public institutions of higher education across the country, including UConn, maintain publicly accessible databases of course syllabi for prospective students, researchers and others.

House Bill 5550 was advanced by the Government Administration and Elections Committee but died on the House Calendar.

S.B. 325, AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISCLOSURE OF THE RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE CONCERNING MASS REQUESTS UNDER THE ACT.

S.B. 492, AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES.

Senate Bill 325 (Section 1), as voted out of committee, looked to expand address confidentiality under §1-217 to include “a school employee, as defined in section 10-222aa,” which would have included teachers, substitute teachers, administrators, superintendents, counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, physicians, paraeducators, coaches” and others who have regular contact with students.

Senate Bill 492 (Section 1) expanded §1-217 to include state-wide elected officials, members of the General Assembly, state government appointees, probate judges, chief elected officers or

executive officers of a municipality, members of municipal boards and commissions, local or regional boards of education, and any other public agency employees. The Commission opposed Section 1 of both bills for the reasons stated above regarding House Bill 5548 (Section 1).

Senate Bill 325 (Section 2) also proposed to establish a task force to study the issue of individuals using artificial intelligence to develop mass requests for information under the FOI Act, and whether any changes in law are necessary to assist public agencies in handling such requests. The Commission was included in the proposed task force and did not object to the legislation.

Senate Bill 325 was voted out of the Government Oversight Committee and Senate Bill 492 was voted out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee but neither bill saw a vote in the Senate.

H.B. 5555, AN ACT EXPANDING THE ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM OF THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE.

S.B. 485, AN ACT EXPANDING THE ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM TO SHIELD LAND RECORDS AND INCLUDE PRIVATE ENTITIES.

House Bill 5555 and Senate Bill 485, as amended, proposed to expand Secretary of the State's Address Confidentiality Program to certain municipal land and tax records of program participants, shielding those records from public inspection. Senate Bill 485, as voted out of committee, also sought to amend §1-210(b)(21) of the FOI Act to include "any real property record" shielded under the proposed expansion to the Address Confidentiality Program. While acknowledging the safety concerns the legislation sought to address, the Commission also noted the importance of public access to complete and accurate land and tax records. The Commission opposed both bills on the grounds that the restrictions would be difficult to administer and would likely disrupt, for example, title searches and notification of adjoining landowners in planning and zoning matters, among other matters.

House Bill 5555 was reported out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee with substitute language that removed the proposal described above. The bill then died on the House floor. Senate Bill 485 passed the Government Administration and Elections Committee and the Senate, as amended. It was not called for a vote in the House.

S.B. 324, AN ACT CONCERNING GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT OVER FRAUD AND WASTE AND ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT AND EFFICIENCY.

S.B. 462, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT.

Senate Bill 324 and Senate Bill 462 both sought to create a new government office tasked with investigating waste, fraud and abuse in state government. While the Commission did not take a position on the public policy reasons behind establishing such an office, it did oppose sections of the proposed legislation that would grant broad confidentiality to records received by or created by the offices. Specifically, Senate Bill 324 contained language that "all records of the Office of

Government Oversight and Efficiency relating to an actual or potential inspection, or inquiry or investigation, shall be confidential and shall not be public records” until all inspections, inquiries or investigations have been concluded – and all criminal and civil actions arising from the records have been adjudicated or settled. Records could be released earlier at the discretion of the executive director. That language was mirrored in Senate Bill 462. The Commission argued that shielding from public disclosure all records of such an agency for the period described could undermine confidence in the agency and result in the withholding of important information from legislators, the press and the public at large. Senate Bill 324, as originally introduced, also contained a provision requiring state agencies to provide written notice to all persons for whom it has an email address of any “material and substantial change in the law” that the agency is “charged with implementing or enforcing.” The Commission noted that this section would be extremely difficult to implement.

Senate Bill 324 passed the Government Oversight Committee with substitute language that amended the proposed exemption to include a two-year time limit after which the records would no longer be confidential. The bill died without a vote in the Senate. Senate Bill 462 advanced in the Government Administration and Elections Committee and the Appropriations Committee but was not called for a vote in the Senate.

S.B. 466, AN ACT CONCERNING VEXATIOUS REQUESTERS UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.

Senate Bill 466 sought to amend §1-206(b)(6), the provision of the FOI Act that allows public agencies to petition the Commission for relief from a vexatious requester. Specifically, the bill would have expanded the provision to allow for petitions in instances of “harassing or threatening conduct” including, but not limited to, conduct that took place at or outside an agency’s office regardless of whether the conduct was related to a records request. It also sought to enable the Commission to afford additional relief to a petitioning agency if the requester has previously been found to be vexatious.

The Commission did not oppose the extended relief as it remained within the Commission’s discretion. However, the Commission argued that petitions filed under §1-206(b)(6) must have a nexus related to records requests made under the FOI Act and that the Commission already considers “harassing or threatening conduct” when evaluating the respondent’s conduct and considering whether to grant a petition under this statute. The Commission also noted that “harassing” and “threatening” were not defined in the proposed legislation.

Senate Bill 466 was voted out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee but did not receive a vote in the Senate.

BILLS DEFEATED – UNFAVORABLE RESULTS

H.B. 5250, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COMMISSION FOR REVISIONS TO THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.

House Bill 5250 consisted of recommendations submitted by the FOI Commission to the legislature. Such recommendations proposed to revise the following provisions in the FOI Act: §§1-200(11) and 1-218 (definition of “governmental function” and contracts in excess of \$2.5 million); §1-205(e) (training by the Commission); §1-212(g) (hand-held scanner definition); §1-225(d) (electronic notice of special meetings to board members); and §1-210(d) (appeals brought for denial of access to public records under §1-210(b)(19) (safety and security exemption). House Bill 5250 is the fifth year in a row that the Commission has submitted such recommendations.

House Bill 5250 advanced out of the Government Oversight Committee and passed the House with an amendment. It did not receive a vote in the Senate.

H.B. 5528, AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC AGENCY EMPLOYEES TO ATTEND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT TRAINING.

House Bill 5528 proposed to amend §1-205(e) of the FOI Act to require “each member of a public agency” to complete training on the FOI Act. It would allow the Commission to create a video or digital recording for the purposes of the training. The Commission testified in support of the legislation, but sought clarification on the scope of the bill, noting that, as written, it would have required all state and municipal employees to attend training as well as all elected officials and appointees at the state and local level.

The Commission did not oppose the proposal, but noted that the additional training requirement may result in the need for additional resources if the Commission was responsible for enforcing and tracking compliance by every public employee and agency.

House Bill 5528 was voted out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee but died on the House calendar.

S.B. 250, AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF STATE AGENCY RESPONSE TIMES TO FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS.

Senate Bill 250 would have required the Office of Policy and Management to conduct a study of state agency response times to records requests and submit its results to the legislature including a summary of average state agency response times, and information about when unreasonable response times were the basis of a complaint filed with the Commission. The Commission supported the proposal, which was previously raised during the 2025 legislative session, noting in its testimony that some state agencies have taken years to respond to records requests.

Senate Bill 250 advanced out of the Government Oversight Committee but was not called for a vote in the Senate.

NEUTRAL

P.A. 26-94; S.B. 488, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE TREASURER'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISIONS TO THE UNCLAIMED PROPERTY PROGRAM AND SECOND INJURY FUND.

Senate Bill 488 (Section 5) exempts from disclosure certain information maintained by the Office of the Treasurer related to administering the state's Unclaimed Property Program. As initially drafted, the legislation would have made confidential "personal information" contained within unclaimed property records including an individual's "name in conjunction with (1) the Social Security number or other government issued number or identifier, (2) date of birth, (3) date of death, (4) home or physical address or other contact information, (5) Internet provider address, (6) account number, or (7) abandoned property value." While the Commission understood concerns regarding access to some of the delineated information, it noted that the Office of the Treasurer, pursuant to state law, maintains a public website – www.CTBigList.com – where information such as addresses and abandoned property values are available online and searchable to the public. The Commission staff worked with the proponents of the bill on compromise language to ensure publicly posted information remains available under the FOI Act. The bill was subsequently amended to make confidential only "personal information" of owners that is "not published on the searchable list required" under state law.

Senate Bill 488 passed the Government Administration and Elections Committee and the Senate, as amended. It received approval in the House and has been signed into law by the Governor.

P.A. 26-8; H.B. 5350, AN ACT CONCERNING CANNABIS, HEMP AND INFUSED BEVERAGE REGULATION.

House Bill 5350 makes various changes to statutes relating to cannabis, hemp, and THC-infused beverages. As originally introduced, the bill did not contain language restricting access to public records and meetings. However, House Bill 5350 was amended by the House to include language restricting access to the quarterly meetings of the State-Wide Cannabis, Hemp and Controlled Substances Enforcement Board, and all documents associated with those meetings. Such legislation was not subject to a public hearing.

While House Bill 5350, as amended, passed the House and Senate, the Commission worked with proponents to insert language in a different bill to narrow the legislation. House Bill 5222 (Public Act 26-100) stated that "any portion of the quarterly meetings of the [State-Wide Cannabis, Hemp and Controlled Substances Enforcement] board during which discussion of identified areas of need and enforcement opportunities concerning illegal cannabis and controlled substance sales occurs may be held in executive session," and made only records specific to those concerns exempt under the FOI Act.

House Bill 5350 was voted out of the General Law Committee and passed the House, as amended, and the Senate. The Governor has signed House Bill 5350.

S.B. 225, AN ACT CONCERNING FEES FOR COPYING, REVIEWING AND REDACTING RECORDS CREATED BY POLICE BODY-WORN RECORDING EQUIPMENT AND DASHBOARD CAMERAS.

Senate Bill 225 sought to allow law enforcement agencies to charge a redaction fee under certain circumstances for the disclosure of a record created by police body-worn recording equipment and dashboard cameras, the fourth year in a row such a proposal was considered by the General

Assembly. The Commission's staff has worked with the proponents of the legislation to establish a reasonable fee structure for the provision of such records. The Commission did not oppose the bills, as unlike previous years, there were no new exemptions to disclosure proposed.

Senate Bill 225 was reported out favorably by the Government Administration and Elections Committee but was not called for a vote in the Senate.

P.A. 26-14; S.B. 397, AN ACT CONCERNING DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE USE AND RETENTION OF DATA DERIVED FROM AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READER SYSTEMS.

P.A. 26-64; S.B. 4, AN ACT CONCERNING CONSUMER PRIVACY AND PROTECTION.

H.B. 5449, AN ACT CONCERNING AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READER SYSTEMS.

H.B. 5552, AN ACT CONCERNING REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE CONTRACTS CONCERNING AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READER INFORMATION.

Senate Bill 4, Senate Bill 397, House Bill 5449 and House Bill 5552, all contained provisions regarding confidentiality of certain data captured by automated license plate readers ("ALPR") used by law enforcement agencies. The Commission's engagement in discussions on the bills was limited given that there were cases pending on the Commission's docket at the time regarding access to such data. Other open government advocates, however, stressed the importance of maintaining access to information about how law enforcement agencies use ALPR, including policies, access logs, audits and other records.

Each bill had a slightly different approach to disclosure, but ultimately the legislature adopted Senate Bill 397, which made confidential "automated license plate reader data," defined as any data captured, recorded, held or stored, processed or derived from an ALPR system, including but not limited to license plate characters, vehicle still or video images, vehicle attributes, location data, time stamps and metadata. Such data was deemed not to be a public record for purposes of the FOI Act. Senate Bill 397, however, specifically made available under the FOI Act certain information including locations of APLR devices, audits, usage logs and access logs. The bill also permitted registered vehicle owners to access their own data provided all registered owners consented to the disclosure.

Senate Bill 397 passed the Judiciary Committee and the Senate, as amended. It was approved in the House and has been signed into law by the Governor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Freedom of Information Commission's legislative team – Danielle McGee, Colleen Murphy, Paula Pearlman, Russell Blair, Zack Hyde, Nicholas Smarra, Mary Kate Smith, Paul Arce and Molly Steffes – for their assistance during the session.

We would also like to provide special recognition to Liz Gemski, Mike Savino, Michele Jacklin and the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information, for their tireless work advocating for freedom of information and good government.

In addition, we would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance this year:

Representative Matthew Ritter, Speaker of the House (1st District);
Representative Bob Godfrey, Deputy Speaker Pro-Tempore (110th District);
Representative Josh Elliott, Deputy Speaker (88th District);
Representative Jason Rojas, House Majority Leader (9th District);
Representative Lucy Dathan (142nd District);
Representative Dominique Johnson (143rd District);
Representative Vincent Candelora, House Republican Leader (86th District);
Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco, Assistant House Republican Leader (80th District);
Senator Cathy Osten, Senate Deputy President Pro Tempore (19th District);
Senator Gary Winfield, Chief Deputy Majority Leader (10th District); and
Senator Rob Sampson (16th District).

BILL TRACKING

During the regular legislative session, we monitored 61 bills. A total of 59 received public hearings and FOI Commission staff prepared statements for and/or testified on 20 of those bills. As of September 3, 2026, 16 of the bills monitored become public acts.