



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight
in support of HB2783 and HB2787
related to Ease of Public Access to Public Records

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The League of Women Voters has historically focused on issues related to voting rights, transparency in governance and fairness in elections. An essential component of transparency is the ability for citizens to access--at reasonable cost and in a timely manner--information which is nominally public and held in government files, whether at the municipal, county, state or federal level.

HB2787 establishes and regulates a commission on public records to assure that all public records are in the proper form and that the rights of other organizations whose records are held by agencies are protected. It authorizes supervisors of public records to conduct adjudicatory proceedings and promulgate regulations pertaining to the dissemination of public records; requires compliance with public records requests within ten days; and imposes a fine and/or imprisonment for removal or defacement of public records. Together with HB2783, this bill provides for the best possible access to public records by the citizenry while protecting legitimate interests.

HB2783 makes it obligatory for any agency holding electronically stored public records to make them readily available in digital format at reasonable cost. It mandates that records be provided electronically when available, by amending statutes relative to public records to include public record information which may be separately retrieved from an electronic record; requires state agencies to designate records access officers for the purpose of acting as custodians of such records; and directs said officers to disseminate information upon request for a reasonable fee not to exceed the cost of reproducing a document. This bill will thus assure citizen rights to have public records actually available to them.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts strongly supports HB2783 and HB2787, as we did the predecessors in the 2011-12 legislative session.