

Coalition Supports Public Information Being Available Online, Calls for Hearings on the Public Online Information Act

March 16, 2010

The undersigned organizations and individuals respectfully urge Congress to hold hearings on the Public Online Information Act (POIA).

The Public Online Information Act requires government information that is public to be made available in the broadest, most accessible manner -- online. Our vital public information can enhance accountability, spur commerce, and empower citizenship, but only if we create and require meaningful digital access to it. POIA creates this meaningful access through two mechanisms.

First, POIA mandates that the Executive Branch make public records permanently available on the Internet, with a few exceptions. To coordinate this new mandate, POIA creates new authority within existing structures to strengthen responsibility for transparency.

Second, POIA creates an advisory body of government officials and private citizens to ensure that all three branches of government work together to establish best practices for making this information available online. This special federal advisory committee will coordinate the development of government-wide Internet disclosure policies.

POIA also empowers citizens by creating a new public inventory of agencies' information, and by granting a private right of action that strengthens citizens' ability to access government information. Private individuals or organizations may make "POIA requests" for an agency to publish public records online. Denied requests may be appealed in federal court, under procedures similar to those available under FOIA, where a judge may order improperly withheld public records to be published online.

While POIA will dramatically improve public access to government information, it does so in a pragmatic manner. Its online publication requirements apply only to newly created information, are subject to a few exceptions, and become enforceable three years after enactment.

We urge Congress to take the next step in building a more transparent government by holding hearings on the Public Online Information Act.

Association For Community Networking (AFCN)
Brennan Center for Justice
Public.Resource.Org
Center for Democracy and Technology
Center for Media and Democracy
Center for Responsive Politics
Change Congress
Chicago Digital Access Alliance
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
Essential Information

Federation of American Scientists
Free Press
Government Accountability Project
Illinois Community Technology Coalition
Institute for Policy Innovation
iSolon
Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School
Minnesota Coalition on Government Information
National Coalition for History
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