

CHAPTER 631

H.P. 1503 - L.D. 2111

**An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Freedom of
Access Advisory Committee**

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 1 MRSA §411 is enacted to read:

§411. Right To Know Advisory Committee

1. Advisory committee established. The Right To Know Advisory Committee, referred to in this chapter as "the advisory committee," is established to serve as a resource for ensuring compliance with this chapter and upholding the integrity of the purposes underlying this chapter as it applies to all public entities in the conduct of the public's business.

2. Membership. The advisory committee consists of the following members:

A. One Senator who is a member of the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over judiciary matters, appointed by the President of the Senate;

B. One member of the House of Representatives who is a member of the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over judiciary matters, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

C. One representative of municipal interests, appointed by the Governor;

D. One representative of county or regional interests, appointed by the President of the Senate;

E. One representative of school interests, appointed by the Governor;

F. One representative of law enforcement interests, appointed by the President of the Senate;

G. One representative of the interests of State Government, appointed by the Governor;

H. One representative of a statewide coalition of advocates of freedom of access, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

I. One representative of newspaper and other press interests, appointed by the President of the Senate;

J. One representative of newspaper publishers, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

K. Two representatives of broadcasting interests, one appointed by the President of the Senate and one appointed by the Speaker of the House;

L. Two representatives of the public, one appointed by the President of the Senate and one appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

M. The Attorney General or the Attorney General's designee.

The advisory committee shall invite the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court to designate a member of the judicial branch to serve as a member of the committee.

3. Terms of appointment. The terms of appointment are as follows.

A. Except as provided in paragraph B, members are appointed for terms of 3 years.

B. Members who are Legislators are appointed for the duration of the legislative terms of office in which they were appointed.

C. Members may serve beyond their designated terms until their successors are appointed.

4. First meeting; chair. The Executive Director of the Legislative Council shall call the first meeting of the advisory committee as soon as funding permits. At the first meeting, the advisory committee shall select a chair from among its members and may select a new chair annually.

5. Meetings. The advisory committee may meet as often as necessary but not fewer than 4 times a year. A meeting may be called by the chair or by any 4 members.

6. Duties and powers. The advisory committee:

A. Shall provide guidance in ensuring access to public records and proceedings and help to establish an effective process to address general compliance issues and respond to requests for interpretation and clarification of the laws;

B. Shall serve as the central source and coordinator of information about the freedom of access laws and the people's right to know. The advisory committee shall provide the basic information about the requirements of the law and the best practices for agencies and public officials. The advisory committee shall also provide general information about the freedom of access laws for a wider and deeper understanding of citizens' rights and their role in open government. The advisory committee shall coordinate the education efforts by providing information about the freedom of access laws and who to contact for specific inquiries;

C. Shall serve as a resource to support the establishment and maintenance of a central publicly accessible website that provides the text of the freedom of access laws and provides specific guidance on how a member of the public can use the law to be a better informed and active participant in open government. The website must include the contact information for agencies, as well as who to contact with complaints and concerns. The website must also include, or contain a link to, a list of statutory exceptions to the public records laws;

D. Shall serve as a resource to support training and education about the freedom of access laws. Although each agency is responsible for training for the specific records and meetings pertaining to that agency's mission, the advisory committee shall provide core resources for the training, share best practices experiences and support the establishment and maintenance of online training as well as written question-and-answer summaries about specific topics;

E. Shall serve as a resource for the review committee under subchapter 1-A in examining public records exceptions in both existing laws and in proposed legislation;

F. Shall examine inconsistencies in statutory language and may recommend standardized language in the statutes to clearly delineate what information is not public and the circumstances under which that information may appropriately be released;

G. May make recommendations for changes in the statutes to improve the laws and may make recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court and local and regional governmental entities with regard to best practices in providing the public access to records and proceedings and to maintain the integrity of the freedom of access laws and their underlying principles. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over judiciary matters may report out legislation based on the advisory committee's recommendations;

H. Shall serve as an adviser to the Legislature when legislation affecting public access is considered;

I. May conduct public hearings, conferences, workshops and other meetings to obtain information about, discuss, publicize the needs of and consider solutions to problems concerning access to public proceedings and records;

J. Shall review the collection, maintenance and use of records by agencies and officials to ensure that confidential records and information are protected and public records remain accessible to the public; and

K. May undertake other activities consistent with its listed responsibilities.

7. Outside funding for advisory committee activities. The advisory committee may seek outside funds to fund the cost of public hearings, conferences, workshops, other meetings, other activities of the advisory committee and educational and training materials. Contributions to support the work of the advisory committee may not be accepted from any party having a pecuniary or other vested interest in the outcome of the matters being studied. Any person, other than a state agency, desiring to make a financial or in-kind contribution shall certify to the Legislative Council that it has no pecuniary or other vested interest in the outcome of the advisory committee's activities. Such a certification must be made in the manner prescribed by the

Legislative Council. All contributions are subject to approval by the Legislative Council. All funds accepted must be forwarded to the Executive Director of the Legislative Council along with an accounting record that includes the amount of funds, the date the funds were received, from whom the funds were received and the purpose of and any limitation on the use of those funds. The Executive Director of the Legislative Council shall administer any funds received by the advisory committee.

8. Compensation. Legislative members of the advisory committee are entitled to receive the legislative per diem, as defined in Title 3, section 2, and reimbursement for travel and other necessary expenses for their attendance at authorized meetings of the advisory committee. Public members not otherwise compensated by their employers or other entities that they represent are entitled to receive reimbursement of necessary expenses and, upon a demonstration of financial hardship, a per diem equal to the legislative per diem for their attendance at authorized meetings of the advisory committee.

9. Staffing. The Legislative Council shall provide staff support for the operation of the advisory committee, except that the Legislative Council staff support is not authorized when the Legislature is in regular or special session. In addition, the advisory committee may contract for administrative, professional and clerical services if funding permits.

10. Report. By January 15, 2007 and at least annually thereafter, the advisory committee shall report to the Governor, the Legislative Council, the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over judiciary matters and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court about the state of the freedom of access laws and the public's access to public proceedings and records.

Sec. 2. 1 MRSA §431, sub-§3 is enacted to read:

3. Advisory committee. "Advisory committee" means the Right To Know Advisory Committee established in Title 5, section 12004-J, subsection 14 and described in section 411.

Sec. 3. 1 MRSA §432, as enacted by PL 2003, c. 709, §3, is amended to read:

§432. Exceptions to public records; review

1. Recommendations. During the second regular session of each Legislature, the review committee ~~shall~~ may report out legislation containing its recommendations concerning the repeal, modification and continuation of public records exceptions and

any recommendations concerning the exception review process. Before reporting out legislation, the review committee shall notify the appropriate committees of jurisdiction concerning public hearings and work sessions and shall allow members of the appropriate committees of jurisdiction to participate in work sessions.

2. Process of evaluation. According to the schedule in section 434 ~~433~~, the ~~review~~ advisory committee shall evaluate each public records exception that is scheduled for review that biennium. This section does not prohibit the evaluation of a public record exception by either the advisory committee or the review committee at a time other than that listed in section 433. ~~The review committee shall use the following criteria to determine~~ apply in determining whether each exception scheduled for review should be repealed, modified or remain unchanged:

- A. Whether a record protected by the exception still needs to be collected and maintained;
- B. The value to the agency or official or to the public in maintaining a record protected by the exception;
- C. Whether federal law requires a record to be confidential;
- D. Whether the exception protects an individual's privacy interest and, if so, whether that interest substantially outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of records;
- E. Whether public disclosure puts a business at a competitive disadvantage and, if so, whether that business's interest substantially outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of records;
- F. Whether public disclosure compromises the position of a public body in negotiations and, if so, whether that public body's interest substantially outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of records;
- G. Whether public disclosure jeopardizes the safety of a member of the public or the public in general and, if so, whether that safety interest substantially outweighs the public interest in the disclosure of records;
- H. Whether the exception is as narrowly tailored as possible; and
- I. Any other criteria that assist the review committee in determining the value of the exception as compared to the public's interest in the record protected by the exception.

2-A. Accountability review of agency or official. In evaluating each public records exception, the advisory committee shall, in addition to applying the criteria of subsection 2, determine whether there is a publicly accountable entity that has authority to review the agency or official that collects, maintains or uses the record subject to the exception in order to ensure that information collection, maintenance and use are consistent with the purpose of the exception and that public access to public records is not hindered.

2-B. Recommendations to review committee. The advisory committee shall report its recommendations under this section to the review committee no later than the convening of the second regular session of each Legislature.

3. Assistance from committees of jurisdiction. The review advisory committee ~~shall~~ may seek assistance in evaluating public records exceptions from the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over the subject matter related to the exceptions being reviewed. The review advisory committee may hold ~~joint~~ public hearings ~~with~~ after notice to the appropriate committees of jurisdiction. ~~The review committee shall notify the appropriate committees of jurisdiction concerning work sessions and shall allow members of the appropriate committees of jurisdiction to participate in work sessions.~~

Sec. 4. 1 MRSA §433, sub-§1, as enacted by PL 2003, c. 709, §3, is repealed.

Sec. 5. 1 MRSA §433, sub-§§2 and 3 are enacted to read:

2. Scheduling guidelines. The advisory committee shall use the following list as a guideline for scheduling reviews of public records exceptions.

A. Exceptions codified in the following Titles are scheduled for review in 2008:

- (1) Title 1;
- (2) Title 2;
- (3) Title 3;
- (4) Title 4;
- (5) Title 5;

(6) Title 6;

(7) Title 7;

(8) Title 8;

(9) Title 9-A; and

(10) Title 9-B.

B. Exceptions codified in the following Titles are scheduled for review in 2010:

(1) Title 10;

(2) Title 11;

(3) Title 12;

(4) Title 13;

(5) Title 13-B;

(6) Title 13-C;

(7) Title 14;

(8) Title 15;

(9) Title 16;

(10) Title 17;

(11) Title 17-A;

(12) Title 18-A;

(13) Title 18-B;

(14) Title 19-A;

(15) Title 20-A; and

(16) Title 21-A.

C. Exceptions codified in the following Titles are scheduled for review in 2012:

(1) Title 22;

(2) Title 23;

(3) Title 24;

(4) Title 24-A; and

(5) Title 25.

D. Exceptions codified in the following Titles are scheduled for review in 2014:

(1) Title 26;

(2) Title 27;

(3) Title 28-A;

(4) Title 29-A;

(5) Title 30;

(6) Title 30-A;

(7) Title 31;

(8) Title 32;

(9) Title 33;

(10) Title 34-A;

(11) Title 34-B;

(12) Title 35-A;

(13) Title 36;

(14) Title 37-B;

(15) Title 38; and

(16) Title 39-A.

3. Scheduling changes. The advisory committee may make adjustments to the scheduling guidelines provided in subsection 2 as it determines appropriate and shall notify the review committee of such adjustments.

Sec. 6. 1 MRSA §434, sub-§2-A are enacted to read:

2-A. Accountability review of agency or official. In evaluating each proposed public records exception, the review committee shall, in addition to applying the criteria of subsection 2, determine whether there is a publicly accountable entity that has authority to review the agency or official that collects, maintains or uses the record subject to the exception in order to ensure that information collection, maintenance and use are consistent with the purpose of the exception and that public access to public records is not hindered.

Sec. 7. 5 MRSA §12004-J, sub-§14 is enacted to read:

<u>14.</u>	<u>Right To</u>	<u>Legislative</u>	<u>1 MRSA</u>
<u>Freedom of</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Per Diem</u>	<u>§411</u>
<u>Access</u>	<u>Advisory</u>	<u>and Ex-</u>	
	<u>Committee</u>	<u>penses for</u>	
		<u>Legislators</u>	
		<u>and Expenses</u>	
		<u>Only for</u>	
		<u>Certain</u>	
		<u>Members</u>	

Sec. 8. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

LEGISLATURE

Legislature 0081

Initiative: Provides a base allocation of \$500 in fiscal year 2006-07 in the event outside funding is received to fund certain expenses of the Right To Know Advisory Committee.

OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS	2005-06	2006-07
All Other	\$0	\$500
OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS TOTAL	\$0	\$500