




COUNCIL MEMBER GALE BREWER Release

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COUNCIL CONSIDERS BREWER BILL TO FIX FOIL

New York, NY — Council Member Gale A. Brewer’s bill to overhaul the way New York City agencies respond to Freedom of Information Law requests goes before the Committee on Technology [today](#) amid ongoing calls for transparency.

Council Member Brewer introduced [the bill](#) in April in concert with a [report](#) by Reinvent Albany that revealed the public can wait months (or sometimes years!) for City agencies to provide the records they requested. About 15% of FOIL requests submitted in Q1 and Q2 of 2024 were still open one year later.

The slowest agencies to respond are the Department of Correction, which averages 485 days, and the Mayor’s Office, which averages 283 days. These are among the agencies that need the most public scrutiny.

Brewer’s bill would add transparency to FOIL requests across all agencies, making it easier for the public to track and access government records and to hold the City accountable for timely and complete responses.

“To me, the most exciting provision of the bill is the ‘release to one, release to all’ rule, meaning agencies would be required to publish the records they release via FOIL in a searchable database for all to see,” said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer**. “I’ve been interested in government transparency for a long time. As a City Council staffer in the 1970s I typed lists of government contacts and handed them out to people. As a council member in 2012, I passed the City’s first Open Data Law requiring all public data be made available online. Transparency and accountability are not optional in government.”

Yesterday, Reinvent Albany, Citizens Union, the Legal Aid Society and ten other good government groups released a [memo of support](#) for the bill, Int. 1235, saying the changes would “ensure that NYC government continues to be transparent and accountable to its biggest funders – the public.”

“Reinvent Albany thanks Council Member Brewer for introducing 1235, which will better allow the public and City Council to hold agencies accountable for delays and failures to comply with New York’s fundamental transparency law—the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL),” said **Rachael Fauss, Senior Policy Advisor for Reinvent Albany**. “This bill is the next logical step in transparency beyond the city’s Open Data Law, and will revolutionize FOIL compliance in New York City.”

“For too long, New York City agencies have delayed or denied access to public records that New Yorkers are entitled to under the law,” said **Grace Rauh, Executive Director of Citizens Union**. “By enshrining and expanding the OpenRecords portal, this legislation will give policymakers a clearer view of how agencies are complying with transparency laws, and move us closer to a system where public records are truly public. We applaud Council Member Gale Brewer for championing this much-needed reform and urge the Council to pass it to strengthen transparency and accountability in city government.”

“Our office is still waiting for records we requested more than four years ago,” said **Laura Motaff, Staff Attorney from The Legal Aid Society**. “When it takes longer to get a response to a FOIL request than it does to get a law degree, that’s a sign that the system is broken. Int. 1235 will enact common sense reforms and provide desperately-needed oversight of City agencies’ FOIL processes.”

“New York City’s Freedom of Information Law is broken,” said **Surveillance Technology Oversight Project Legal Intern Sarah Roth**. “For too long, city agencies like NYPD have hidden behind an opaque system that helps them avoid real accountability to the communities they are meant to serve. This much-needed reform would finally make the process transparent, tracking agencies’ FOIL responses in a centralized website. City agencies must stop their shadowy gatekeeping of information the public has a right to know. New Yorkers deserve answers, not avoidance.”

“Public and accessible records are essential to good governance — yet too often, New York City agencies make it difficult for the public to know what’s going on,” said **Justin Harrison, Senior Policy Counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. “By improving the City’s OpenRecords portal and requiring agencies to publish detailed data on FOIL requests, this bill will allow more New Yorkers to stay informed, hold their government accountable, and strengthen transparency across city operations.”

“It is long past time when the confusion and delays affecting the City’s FOI processing should come to an end,” said **Victor A. Kovner, former Corporation Counsel of New York City**. “A centralized system for processing FOI requests is long overdue.”

“Freedom of information is only effective as a tool to ensure trust in government when that right is simple to exercise and compliance with requests is timely and transparent,” said **George Freeman, Executive Director of the Media Law Resource Center**. “Int. 1235 will assist not only the news media but all New Yorkers to understand both the workings of City agencies and how information about their records is made available to the public.”

“It shouldn’t take New York City agencies hundreds of days to release important information to the public, but that’s what’s happening everywhere from the Department of Corrections to the Mayor’s Office,” said **Lauren Harper, Freedom of the Press Foundation’s first Daniel Ellsberg Chair on Government Secrecy**. “That’s why Freedom of the Press Foundation supports Int. 1235. This important legislation will make it easier for New Yorkers to file information requests, speed up agency response times, and make it easier for all members of the public to read agency responses.”

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