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January 14, 2016

The Honorable Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda
Room 1001, The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: HB 4005, University DSO Public Records and Public Meetings

Dear Representative Rehwinkel Vasilinda:

We write in support of your bill HB 4005 that repeals the overbroad and entrenched exemptions for university direct support organizations.

As we know, several direct support organizations in the education arena have created some nebulous roles for the private sector in governmental business. Your bill deletes the broad public record exemptions traditionally enjoyed by university DSOs, including the questionable exemption for the identity of donors who desire anonymity. While most donors want public attention for their generosity, many with questionable motives do not, and this exemption inhibits our ability to oversee our state universities and hold them accountable.

Additionally, the role of direct support organizations has moved from providing financial support to university programs to actually acting as administrators of those programs. According to recent news reports, both the University of Florida and the University of Central Florida have created DSOs for the specific purpose of administering their respective athletic programs. In moving administration of these programs from the university to the university DSO, the broad public record exemptions that apply to DSOs effectively shuts the door on our ability to access the vast majority of the athletic programs' public records, including coaching staff contracts. We are concerned, obviously, that other state universities will follow the lead of UF and UCF.

We thus commend you for your efforts on behalf of the public, Representative, and wholeheartedly support this meritorious legislation. If we may be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B.A.P.', with a stylized flourish above the letters.

Barbara A. Petersen, President

Cc: The Honorable Steve Crisafulli, Speaker, Florida House of Representatives
Jon Kaney, General Counsel, First Amendment Foundation
Sam Morley, General Counsel, Florida Press Association