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January 25, 2016

Hon. Greg Steube
The Florida House of Representatives
402 South Monroe Street, 204 HOB
Tallahassee, Fl. 32399-1300

Re: HB 1021 Public Records/ Attorney Fees

Dear Representative Steube:

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen, an attorney and a lifelong Florida resident to express my opposition to your House Bill 1021. As you may recognize, I was the lead plaintiff in one of the recent public records cases, Weidner v. Rick Scott, et. al. so I have some very recent personal experience in the issues related to your bill's subject matter. I think it's fair to say that any honest and thoughtful observer of Florida government would recognize this lawsuit represented the very noble intentions and purpose behind Florida's public records law. It is critical to recognize that this lawsuit, like the other lawsuits that have recently been brought against government officials in Florida, are brought to enforce and ultimately vindicate critical Constitutional rights of every citizen of this state.

I am deeply troubled by your bill because it will undeniably have the effect of preventing the meaningful enforcement of a citizen's Constitutional right to examine public records. In your most recent Legislative Update, you write that "Without a doubt, transparency promotes accountability" and while this statement is undeniably true, you must acknowledge that if your bill passes you will usher in an era of dangerous darkness where government officials are shielded from any meaningful accountability.

You introduce your bill at a time when the citizens of this state are more distrustful of their elected and appointed officials than perhaps at any other time in history...and by nearly any credible account, this distrust is well-earned. When you posit the question in your Legislative Update, "Should our local governments be bankrupted by frivolous public records requests?" I suggest that your question is both disingenuous and misleading because no local government faces any legitimate fear of bankruptcy from public records litigation and your question fails to recognize the very noble purpose behind most public records litigation--namely the enforcement of critical Constitutional rights.

Regards,

/s/

Matthew Weidner