



March 12, 2026

Dawn Szewczyk, Chair  
Honolulu Charter Commission

**Re: Testimony on Proposal P005 (Access to Government Records)**

My name is Brian Black. I am Executive Director of Public First Law Center, a nonprofit that promotes government transparency. I write in **support** of proposal P005, concerning access to government records, and suggest consolidation with other government transparency proposals.

This language has a demonstrated history of improving government accountability. In 2022, Maui adopted an identical proposal for its county charter with notable success, improving relations between requesters and government officials. On several occasions since its adoption, the Maui Charter has successfully reminded county officials of the importance residents place on public access to government records. Honolulu's greater size and administrative complexity make this kind of reform all the more necessary.

This proposal sets an important tone for the City. How government treats the public is a litmus test for the health of government as a whole. When government officials treat transparency as an afterthought (or worse an impediment) to performing public duties, accountability and trust suffer. This proposal requires that the City consider public access as an essential service that requires respect and assistance for individuals who seek to know more about how our government operates.

The proposal provides reasonable principles to guide City officials in responding to public records requests. Each guidepost addresses common obstacles to transparency. Agencies typically have exclusive knowledge of what records exist, how those records are maintained, and the most efficient (and thus least costly) way to access those records. This proposal would require the City to discuss with requesters how to minimize the burden on agencies and cost to requesters for obtaining public records. The path to obtaining records should not be fraught with unnecessary hurdles. In the end, we all benefit when residents are more engaged and informed.

We respectfully urge the Commission to advance proposal P005. And to address concerns about excessive proposals on the ballot, we suggest that this proposal could

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Page 2

be consolidated with one or more of the following proposals that also concern transparency as a necessary function of City government.

- Proposal 66, fiscal impact statements for charter amendments and legislation
- Proposal 143, recognition in Charter for the Chief Data Officer
- Proposal 151, budget information in open data format
- Proposal 231, public reports on fiscal impact of ordinances
- Proposal 295, open data portal

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of proposal P005.