



Testimony on House Bill 7211 (an act concerning the preservation of historical records and access to restricted records in the state archives)

Submitted by Scott Shepard, Policy Director

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Good afternoon. My name is Scott Shepard. I am the Policy & Research Director for the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, Connecticut's free-market think tank. I submit this note in support of **House Bill 7211**.

Government acts are public acts. The people have a right to know what they are doing through their representatives. As electors, they need that information in order to make informed decisions at election time. As scholars and students, they need that information – both current and past – preserved for their review, analysis and study, so that we as a people may better understand our history and learn both by its positive example and from its mistakes. A healthy polity must record its activities for itself and its posterity.

Sometimes there arises the countervailing consideration of privacy for private individuals who are only incidentally involved in the public arena. Privacy considerations that are severely limited by the voluntary participation in public life of elected officials must carry greater weight when the information at issue relates only to the private character of government workers or the activities of wholly private citizens. Yet with the passage of decades the urgency of private reputation fades along with any possibility of potentially salacious interest, with only the sober and objective imperatives of history and scholarship remaining. A half-century seems a reasonable time at which to declare that the interests of public knowledge and scholarly inquiry have triumphed, and thus to deliver all records, however initially categorized, into the public sphere. Even the national security agencies recognize that records, however important or confidential, should not be kept secret forever.

For all of these reasons, we support **House Bill 7211**.