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## **NHPA Opposes Senate Bill 39**

The New Hampshire Press Association opposes SB 39, which would bring the state's public transparency laws in exactly the wrong direction.

Last year, Gov. Chris Sununu's commission on Law Enforcement Accountability, Community and Transparency spent countless hours discussing ways to increase public access to the actions and records of police officers, with the understanding that openness builds public trust.

Most of the commission's recommendations have been initiated through executive order by Governor Sununu.

SB 39, however, moves the state away from transparency and instead creates a new category of secret government records.

It is a widely held belief that the vast majority of the state's law enforcement officers are beyond reproach. Public interest in police personnel files becomes paramount when an officer has engaged in misconduct. Carving out an exemption to protect a few bad actors undermines the recommendations and goals of the LEACT commission.

Currently, police personnel files are only accessible to the public when there is a compelling interest in disclosure and that determination needs to be made by a judge. There is no need to change current law.

Moreover, state law calls for maximum openness of government records and public bodies are urged to view disclosure broadly and exemptions narrowly.

Creating a new category of exempt records irreparably harms the public's right to hold government officials accountable.

The New Hampshire Press Association urges this committee to increase, not decrease, the public's right to know.

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