



**State of Vermont
Office of the Secretary of State**

Phone: (802) 828-2363
Fax: (802) 828-2496
www.sec.state.vt.us

**James C. Condos, Secretary of State
Brian H. Leven, Deputy Secretary**

Redstone Building
26 Terrace Street
Montpelier, VT 05609-1101

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Contact: Nancy T. Lynch, 802.828.2148

Secretary of State Jim Condos Hails New Public Records Legislation

MONTPELIER – Secretary of State Jim Condos applauds the passage of the new amendments (H.73) to Vermont’s Public Records Law as the beginning of a culture change regarding the access of public records held by local and state government offices.

“This is the most positive and significant change to public records laws since their inception in the mid 1970s,” Condos stated.

Condos said he is pleased the legislature agreed with a change of one word – “may” be awarded attorneys fees to “shall” be awarded attorneys fees when a private citizen or group goes to court to successfully obtain public records improperly withheld by the governmental official or body. Condos said this was an important issue he talked about throughout his campaign for Secretary of State last year and that he has remained consistent on the importance of the issue throughout the legislative session.

Mandatory legal fees and maintaining “free inspections” will assist Vermonters in knowing that unnecessary barriers to public access of state and local government have been reduced. He noted that much like Vermonters being able to read for free in public libraries, they should be able to inspect government records for free.

“Open government is good government,” Condos stated.

Secretary Condos is especially thankful to Rep. Donna Sweaney (D-Windsor) and Senator Jeanette White (D-Windham) - Chairwomen of House and Senate Government Operations Committees - and their respective committees for their thoughtful approach and persistence to pass H.73.

Condos will now begin developing the curriculum for his “Vermont Transparency Tour” designed to travel the state to help educate and train local and state government officials on the Access to Public Records and Open Meetings laws of the state. Condos announced the 12-town “Transparency Tour” last month as a way to combat comments that some officials had little or no training about Vermont’s Open Government Laws. He will coordinate this tour this summer with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Municipal Clerks and Treasurers, American Civil Liberties Union, Common Cause - VT, and the Vermont Press Association.

Jim Condos is Vermont’s Secretary of State, after serving eight years as a Vermont Senator from Chittenden County, 18 years on South Burlington City Council and 30+ years of private sector business experience.

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