

## The Public's Right to Know

"The effective functioning of a free government like ours depends largely on the force of an informed public opinion. This calls for the widest possible understanding of the quality of government service rendered by all elective or appointed public officials or employees. Such an informed understanding depends, of course, on the freedom people have to applaud or to criticize the way public employees do their jobs, from the least to the most important."  
JUSTICE BLACK, *Barr v. Matteo*

All federal agencies are generally required under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to disclose records requested in writing by any person. However, agencies may withhold information pursuant to nine exemptions and three exclusions contained in the statute.

FOIA Pamphlet [http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic\\_text/fed\\_prog/foia/foia.pdf](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/fed_prog/foia/foia.pdf)

*A Citizen's Guide to the FOIA* (2005) A guide to both the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act prepared by the House Committee on Government Reform. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/foia/citizen.pdf>

"A record 15.6 million documents were classified last year, nearly double the number in 2001, according to the federal Information Security Oversight Office."<sup>1</sup>

Today there is much debate about how much information should be released, to whom it should be given, and whether the requestor should have to pay for a copy of the information.

The increasing secrecy - and its rising cost to taxpayers, estimated by the office at \$7.2 billion last year - is drawing protests from a growing array of politicians and activists, including Republican members of Congress, leaders of the independent commission that studied the Sept. 11 attacks and even the top federal official who oversees classification.<sup>1</sup>

Should government (at all levels) release to the public all facts, figures, reports, plans and information? Write an essay supporting the disclosure of information. Include where you would draw the line. Justify the limits you would set.

"An informed public is the bulwark of a democracy." Thomas Jefferson

<sup>1</sup> Increase in the Number of Documents Classified by the Government, New York Times, By SCOTT SHANE  
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