

March 19, 2012

Cass Sunstein  
Administrator  
Office of Information and Regulatory Policy  
Office of Management and Budget  
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Sunstein:

In advance of your testimony before the House Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations, and Procurement Reform on March 21, 2012, we write to reaffirm our strong commitment to the FOIA portal developed by the Environmental Protection Agency, with the assistance of the Department of Commerce and the National Archives and Records Administration.

The FOIA portal offers the best hope for improving the administration's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and affording the public the broadest access to government documents. It also could be a key component to realizing the commitment, expressed in the National Action Plan for the Open Government Partnership, to "expand [the government's] use of technology to achieve greater efficiencies in FOIA administration." By leveraging existing multi-agency efforts, the FOIA portal presents an innovative, shared solution that can reduce processing costs, support compliance with statutory deadlines, and improve customer service. Openness groups like those we represent would applaud the administration's endorsement of the FOIA portal as part of implementing its National Action Plan goal.

We understand some in the Department of Justice have discouraged agencies from participating in the FOIA portal pilot project, suggesting its website, [www.FOIA.gov](http://www.FOIA.gov), offers a better option with its newly-added links to all agency websites. Those links, however, are no replacement for the FOIA portal, which will provide a uniform and central location for filing FOIA requests and free public on-line access to any documents released. As we have expressed to your staff previously, the strength of FOIA.gov lies in the government-wide FOIA data it makes available, a feature not replicated by the FOIA portal. The FOIA portal should help agencies manage their requests electronically, track the processing workflow, and help requesters check the status of their requests. The same tools we hope to see in the FOIA portal should feed more granular reporting data to FOIA.gov. FOIA.gov and the FOIA portal should work seamlessly to give agencies and the public better tools to manage FOIA processing, track requests, identify bottlenecks, and push for improvements. The government should support both by developing both.

We look forward to your congressional testimony and hope you will express your strong support for the FOIA portal. In the meantime, we will be sharing our views with appropriate congressional staff.

Sincerely,

American Society of News Editors

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington- CREW

OMB Watch

OpenTheGovernment.org

Project On Government Oversight – POGO

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

cc: Chairman Darrell Issa, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee

Ranking Member Elijah Cummings, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee