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PNA comments on open records legislation

HARRISBURG, Pa., Oct. 22, 2007 — The Pennsylvania Newspaper Association (PNA) is encouraged by proposed amendments to Senate Bill 1, released today by Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi (R-Delaware).

“We believe that the bill, as proposed to be amended, would be a positive step toward more openness and accountability in Pennsylvania government,” said Tim Williams, PNA president.

“Although we are continuing our review of the specific exemptions, the bill would create the presumption of access in Pennsylvania,” Williams continued. “It would establish a clearinghouse to assist the public with records issues and increase penalties for bad faith violations.”

PNA believes that Pennsylvania’s open records law must begin with the presumption of access and place the burden on an agency denying access. Any exceptions to access, such as those necessary to protect individual medical records, ongoing police investigations, or homeland security-related records, must be written as clearly and narrowly as possible to ensure that the exceptions do not swallow the presumption of openness. Finally, the law must limit fees that agencies may charge and provide for meaningful penalties.

It is widely recognized that Pennsylvania has one of the worst open records laws in the country. PNA opposes House Bill 443, as revised last week in the House, but is hopeful that Senate Bill 1 will lead to meaningful reform to make Pennsylvania government more open and accountable to its citizens.

The PNA, founded in 1925, is a nonprofit trade association. Its mission is to advance the interests of Pennsylvania newspapers, promote the importance of a free and independent press and provide a forum for critical and innovative thinking about the future of journalism and the newspaper industry.

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