BGA Applauds Governor’s Veto of Bad FOIA Bill

Vows to fight a General Assembly attempt to override Quinn’s action and pass HB 3796.

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The Better Government Association applauds Gov. Pat Quinn’s veto of HB 3796, a bill that would have weakened one of state’s most important public disclosure laws—the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

The governor vetoed the bill Friday afternoon.

The BGA, the Illinois Attorney General and other major public advocacy groups had asked Governor Quinn to kill the legislation, which recently came to his desk after passing the General Assembly in the waning days of the last lawmaking session in May.

The BGA said HB 3796 would “unfairly and unjustifiably raise significant barriers” to those seeking access to local municipalities records and data. For example, the measure would allow local governments to charge regular citizens up to $100 to comply with document requests.

“With this veto, Governor Quinn steps up to protect the public’s right to know,” said Andy Shaw, President and CEO of the BGA. “Signing HB 3796 into law would have had a chilling effect on everyday people who are entitled to ask what their government is doing without being charged an arbitrary and excessive amount of money for the answer, especially when they’ve already paid for the information with their tax dollars.”

The BGA is also poised to work against a legislative override of the veto in the fall session of the General Assembly, which overwhelmingly approved HB 3796 in both chambers.

The BGA will encourage those advocacy groups and others who opposed HB 3796 to join that effort.
The General Assembly passed HB 3796 as a means of providing relief to municipal governments that contend excessive FOIA requests were becoming a management drain and a financial burden.

In its letter, the BGA said it was mindful of the municipalities operational and financial concerns but that HB 3796 would not solve those problems and instead would penalize the public.

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In addition to the BGA and Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s office, the other Illinois-based groups that opposed HB 3796 include: Citizen Advocacy Center; Illinois Public Interest Research Group; Illinois Policy Institute; Chicago Headline Club; Illinois Campaign for Political Reform and the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois. Former Chicago Alderman and University of Illinois at Chicago political science professor Dick Simpson also opposed the bill.

The group scheduled a press conference for Monday morning to voice their collective opposition to HR 3796 and support of the Quinn veto.

The Better Government Association is a Chicago-based nonprofit, nonpartisan watchdog group that works for integrity, transparency and accountability in government by exposing corruption and inefficiency; identifying and advocating effective public policy; and engaging and mobilizing the public to achieve authentic and responsible reform.