

Dear Members of the House of Representatives,

We urge you to vote YES on HB 1956 and pass it off the Floor as soon as possible. This legislation would protect sensitive prison records from being released through the Public Records Act. Current law allows the Washington Department of Corrections (DOC) to release sensitive, highly personal records to anyone who requests them, posing a real and present danger to currently and formerly incarcerated people. The case for protecting these records is clear: a federal judge has [held that releasing these records likely violates federal and state law](#). These records have been protected by Washington state jails, other state prison systems, and the federal prison system for years without controversy. Release of sensitive records will hurt public safety by putting current and formerly incarcerated people in danger. **The Legislature must pass HB 1956 this session to protect our community and the state from further liability.**

Over the past year, multiple actors have submitted Public Records Act requests to DOC that explicitly target the sensitive records of vulnerable people in prison, especially transgender people with disabilities. These requests have been made by people connected to an anti-trans hate group, media companies, and others. [Disability Rights Washington and the ACLU filed a lawsuit](#) to prevent the release of these records, and a federal judge has imposed a preliminary injunction. **But these records are only being held temporarily for a small number of people, the state must act to avoid further liability and protect this information for all.**

Releasing sensitive prison records could make anyone who has been to prison the target of assault, harassment, retaliation, and discrimination. For example, under current law people in prison can learn whether another person is a confidential informant, putting them at risk of assault or death. Members of the public can request body scanner images to inspect the naked bodies of the people housed at Washington Corrections Center for Women. Anti-trans hate groups can post an online registry of all transgender people who have been to Washington prisons. Perpetrators of sexual assault can request records to learn whether they were identified by their victims in what victims were told by DOC policy and staff were “confidential” interviews. Landlords and employers can learn whether a tenant or employee is disabled, transgender, gay, or has mental health conditions. These and countless other examples show how limitless disclosure puts people at risk of violence, harassment, discrimination, and the psychological trauma of having their most private information available to any member of the public upon request.

If passed, HB 1956 would provide legislative protection to sensitive records in DOC’s possession, **reinstating privacy protections that were previously part of the Public Records Act and are consistent with national best practices.** From its creation in 1972 until 1989, the Public Records Act explicitly protected the “personal information of... prisoners, probationers, and parolees.” The Legislature eliminated this protection as part of a well-meaning effort to allow DOC to share treatment records with community mental health providers. Unlike prison records, records about incarcerated people in Washington state jails have been strictly confidential under state law for decades without controversy. Beyond Washington, several states and the federal government protect prison records.

This legislation will protect the dignity, privacy, and safety of currently and formerly incarcerated Washingtonians. It will have an outsized impact by providing necessary protections for racial and ethnic minorities who are over-represented in Washington state prisons, people with disabilities and health issues, and LGBTQ+ people. **For all of these reasons, we urge you to vote YES and pass HB 1956 off the Floor as soon as possible.**

Sincerely,

1. ACLU of Washington
2. API Chaya
3. Beyond These Walls
4. Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence
5. Collective Justice
6. Columbia Legal Services
7. Communities of Color Coalition
8. Disability Rights Washington
9. FOTi (Families of the Incarcerated)
10. Freedom Education Project Puget Sound
11. Free Them All WA
12. Gender Justice League
13. GSBA - Washington's LGBTQ+ Chamber
14. Ingersoll Gender Center
15. Legal Voice
16. Look2Justice
17. MOMI--Mothers of the Mentally Ill
18. National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)
WA state
19. Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, and
Allies Student Association at Seattle
University School of Law
20. Northwest Community Bail Fund
21. Northwest Progressive Institute
22. Olympic Community Action Programs
23. Pacific Islander Health Board of Washington
24. Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates -
Washington
25. Prison Mathematics Project
26. QueerDoc
27. QLaw Association of Washington
28. Seattle CritLib
29. TeamChild
30. University Beyond Bars
31. UTOPIA WASHINGTON
32. Washington Association of Criminal Defense
Lawyers
33. Washington Black Lives Matter Alliance
34. Washington Community Alliance
35. Washington Defender Association
36. Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
37. Washington State Coalition Against
Domestic Violence
38. WA State Community Action Partnership

1. Anne Hundley, 22nd LD
2. Catherine West, 43th LD
3. Carrie Freshour, 37th LD
- 4.Carolynn Davies
5. Chanel Rhymes, 28th LD
6. Cindy J. Robinson, 30th LD
7. Clayton M Compton, 48th LD
8. Cynthia Fisher, 49th LD
9. Cynthia Parker, 17th LD
10. Dani Rowland, 48th LD
11. Dani Shapiro, 37th LD
12. Deann Alcantara-Thompson
13. Emily Thuma, 27th LD
14. Emma D, 43rd LD
15. Eric Matthes, 34th LD
16. Evelyn Chow, 37th LD
17. Florence Sum, 47th LD
18. Gillian Harkins, 34th LD
19. Hailey Ockinga, 27th LD
20. Hannah Mason, 37th LD
21. Heather Beecher
22. Jen Dana-Farley, 41st LD
23. Joel Strom
24. John O'Neill, 42nd LD
25. Julia Doherty, 43rd LD
26. Karla M Davis, 21st LD
27. Kay Nelson, 26th LD
28. Kay Nugent, 43th LD
29. Kehaulani Walker, 42nd LD
30. Kelly Johnson, 37th LD
31. Laura Ellsworth, 49th LD
32. Laurie Dawson, 35th LD
33. Leyla Salmassi, 46th LD
34. Lisa Sweet, 11th LD
35. Noreen Light, 22nd LD
36. Matt Goldenberg, PsyD, 22th LD
37. Mindy Woods, 21st LD
38. Paige Hardy, 27th LD
39. Paula Crews Bond
40. Rachel Page, 37th LD
41. Rosemary Blakemore, 43rd LD
42. Ruth A Utnage, 33rd LD
43. Shannon Haan, 43rd LD
44. Sid Jordan, 27th LD
45. Tash Hansen-Day, 27th LD

- 46.** Teresa Clark, 43rd LD
- 47.** Toni Rose Marshall, 6th LD
- 48.** Tracy Turner
- 49.** Victoria Kroeger, 5th LD
- 50.** Wendy Schindler, 44th LD