

Testimony in Support of HB 4218

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At Every Texan, we believe transparency and public access to information are fundamental to a healthy democracy and just policymaking. That’s why we support House Bill 4218, which updates the Texas Public Information Act to ensure communities, advocates, and everyday Texans can access government data in meaningful, usable formats – without unnecessary delays or excessive costs.

Currently, public access to data is often blocked by outdated legal loopholes. Under Section 552.231 of the Government Code, agencies can refuse or delay requests that require “programming” or data filtering, even when the data is already available in spreadsheets or databases. This provision allows agencies to stall or inflate the cost of fulfilling requests, making critical public information harder to access – especially for journalists, researchers, and smaller organizations.

H.B. 4218 makes it clear that if public information exists in a searchable or sortable electronic format, like a spreadsheet or database, the public has the right to receive it that way. It also ensures that cost recovery is fair and limited to actual costs, using the state’s existing guidelines under Section 552.262.

This bill matters for Texans who want to know how their tax dollars are spent, how decisions are made, or how policies impact their communities. Whether you’re a local reporter, a parent, or a nonprofit seeking data to inform your work, you deserve access to public information that is truly public – not locked behind unnecessary technical barriers.

H.B. 4218 is a commonsense update that reflects how governments already manage their data and makes sure that technology is used to increase transparency, not avoid it. We urge lawmakers to pass this bill and make government data accessible to every Texan.