

Many of you have contacted me regarding Senate Bill 6617 – also known as the Legislative Public Records Act. Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this issue and being involved in the legislative process.

I'd like to get past the headlines and just share some facts with you.

Since the Public Records Act passed in 1972, state lawmakers have been advised that the Legislature is not subject to the full extent of the Act because we are an independent branch of government – much like the courts. A number of media organizations challenged this position in a lawsuit. On Jan. 19, a Thurston County Superior Court judge ruled the Legislature as a whole is not an agency subject to the Public Records Act, but that individual state lawmakers' offices are "agencies." There are 147 state lawmakers, thus in effect, creating 147 separate state agencies.

The legislative attorneys I work with believe this decision could be overturned by the state Supreme Court. Legal opinions aside, it created an expensive and unworkable system for the Legislature and threatened my constituents' privacy.

With the uncertainty created by court, state lawmakers decided to act. This resulted in Senate Bill 6617.

The bill requires state lawmakers to provide their calendars, communications with lobbyists and final disciplinary actions taken by the Legislature. None of these things were required to be disclosed prior to the court's decision. They also make our Legislature more transparent.

The bill also preserves constituent privacy. I have constituents contact me with their problems, concerns and ideas, and they sometimes share personal information. It's often my job to help them. These folks expect and deserve confidentiality.

Finally, the bill protects the legislative process, including communications between state lawmakers, nonpartisan staff and partisan staff. Our system works well because these work groups can have candid conversations with one another.

Some of you have criticized the process. I think this criticism is fair. We saw something similar last year when the paid family leave bill was introduced and a day later passed both chambers. The Legislature can and must do better.

If you have not yet done so, I encourage you to read the entire bill- Senate Bill 6617 is only 24 pages. You can read the bill here: <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/6617.PL.pdf>

Thank you for contacting me and engaging in the process.

In service,

Andrew K. Barkis