

April 22, 2019

To: Hon. Lorena Gonzalez, Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee  
Hon. Frank Bigelow, Vice Chair

Hon. Richard Bloom  
Hon. Rob Bonta  
Hon. William P. Brough  
Hon. Ian Calderon  
Hon. Wendy Carrillo  
Hon. Ed Chau  
Hon. Tyler Diep  
Hon. Susan Talamantes Eggman  
Hon. Vince Fong  
Hon. Jesse Gabriel  
Hon. Eduardo Garcia  
Hon. Brian Maienschein  
Hon. Jay Obernolte  
Hon. Cottie Petrie-Norris  
Hon. Bill Quirk  
Hon. Robert Rivas

Dear Members:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Society of Professional Journalists, Greater Los Angeles Pro Chapter, to express our opposition to AB 700 (Friedman), which is scheduled for a hearing before your committee on April 24, 2019, unless the bill is amended.

We note that Chair Lorena Gonzalez and members Ed Chau, Brian Maienschein, and Cottie Petrie-Norris have already supported this legislation, as slightly amended, as members of the Assembly Judiciary Committee. We again respectfully request your careful consideration and opposition to this bill unless further amended to narrow its scope to the bare minimum necessary to ensure both the ability of university researchers to carry out their work without unnecessary impediments, and the public's right to hold its public institutions accountable.

Assemblymember Laura Friedman's bill, sponsored by the Union of Concerned Scientists, is a proposal to amend the California Public Records Act (CPRA) to exclude broad new categories of records related to research conducted through public colleges and universities. UCS and its allies assert that CPRA has been abused to harass researchers, interfere with their work, and compromise and undermine legitimate scholarship and the academic mission of free inquiry.

SPJ/LA respects the integrity of the academy and can readily agree that harassment, threats, and intimidation are antithetical to the proper function of higher education institutions, and to a healthy and robust democracy. But it is our view that AB 700 is a solution in search of a problem.

We believe there are adequate legal protections and statutory remedies already in place that afford colleges and universities ample opportunity to respond effectively to overly intrusive and inappropriate records requests. To the extent that additional legislation may be deemed

necessary, it should be very narrowly tailored and carefully considered in the context of protecting openness and transparency in public institutions, and ensuring the widest possible participation in public processes and decision-making, as paramount values in a democratic society.

We support the positions taken by the California News Publishers Association (CNPA) and the California First Amendment Coalition, who oppose the bill unless amended. And we endorse CNPA's publicly stated commitment "to continuing to work with the author on narrowing the scope of the bill so that it is not harmful to the public's right to know what government agencies are doing on its behalf."

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Bluestein  
President, Society of Professional Journalists, Greater Los Angeles Pro Chapter