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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Bill to Make Communication Between Public Officials Transparent Wins Committee Approval**

AUGUSTA: The Maine Legislature's Judiciary Committee today voted to recommend passage of a bill that seeks to ensure official government communication on important matters is made available to the public.

The sponsor of LD 1551, An Act to Further Regulate the Communications of Members of Public Bodies, Representative Stacy Dostie said that the goal of this legislation is to make government more transparent.

"This bill is about opening government at all levels," Representative Dostie said. "In the past, a major concern for transparency advocates was making sure public officials weren't having secret meetings prior to formal meetings where decisions are made. Now with electronic communications, some elected officials have engaged in group decision making on issues—without the public's input. At times, e-mail today has become the smoke-filled back room for some public officials."

If LD 1551 is passed, the Right to Know Advisory Committee will be ordered to look at the current Freedom of Access laws in Maine and come up with suggestion on how to handle electronic communications of public bodies. Another area they will look at is the civil penalty for this offense. Currently, Maine law has a civil penalty of \$500 per offense for the municipality. Representative Dostie would like to see the civil penalty be \$500 per offence to the offending individual or individuals.