



The Hon. Scott Brison
President of the Treasury Board
90 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R5

April 3, 2017

Dear Minister Brison,

We are writing on behalf of Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, Canadian Association of Journalists, Newspapers Canada, Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ), and the Centre for Free Expression. Our organizations together represent perhaps the largest concentration of regular journalistic users of the access to information system in Canada.

We are concerned by the Liberal government's decision to indefinitely delay reforms to strengthen the *Access to Information Act*. The government recommitted as recently as last month to introducing legislation by the end of winter, a deadline which has since expired. Since Canada's *ATI Act* was passed in 1983, it has not seen any major updates, making it increasingly difficult for Canadians to get the information they need.

Your government's platform commitment to address this crisis is central to its professed aim to revitalize Canadian democracy. The public has the right to obtain the information they need to participate meaningfully in the democratic process, while also holding Canada's public officials and members of Parliament accountable. The current ATI system is failing to meet that standard.

We acknowledge the complexity of the changes, both administrative and cultural, required for ambitious reform. That said, there are a number of concrete measures that the government can bring forward by this fall that have been extensively studied, successfully implemented in other jurisdictions, and do not undermine Canadians' privacy or the neutrality of the public service.

1. Amend the list of exemptions used to restrict the disclosure of information. This issue has been studied in detail by the Information Commissioner, legal experts, and the House of Commons, Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. The Committee's recommendations in [Chapter 5](#) of its report to Parliament provide a strong and eminently practical roadmap for implementing these changes.
2. Extend coverage of the Act to ministers' offices and the PMO. This is an essential component of reform, and an absolutely mandatory change if the commitments made in your mandate letter are to have any substance.

Our access to information system is badly broken and in need of a dramatic overhaul, as your government has repeatedly acknowledged. The changes that are needed to repair



the system are substantial, but by no means unworkable. This government need only display leadership to bring them into being.

We request a meeting with you on an urgent basis to discuss the crisis facing Canada's access to information system, and how your government can best ensure that Canadians right to know is upheld. We will follow up with your office in the coming days to explore dates that would be possible for you to meet with us, and look forward to working together to explore ways we can make access to information reform a reality within the term of this government.

Sincerely,

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|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Tom Henheffer | Nick Taylor-Vaisey | John Hinds | James L. Turk |
| Executive Director | President | Executive Director | Director |
| CJFE | CAJ | Newspapers Canada | Centre for Free Expression |

Caroline Locher
 Executive Director
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