



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

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Committees:

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Representative Danielle W. Gregoire  
Senator Marc R. Pacheco  
Chairs, Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight  
State House, Room 22  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Gregoire and Chair Pacheco,

I write respectfully in support of H.2779, *An Act relating to access to public records*.

This bill makes revisions to our public records law to ensure greater accessibility and transparency. Specifically, section 1 of the bill would make available for public inspection any records in the State Archives after 75 years from the creation of the record. After 75 years, restrictions on access to these records no longer play an appropriate role in safeguarding personal privacy and public safety. Instead, they can become an obstacle to legitimate and useful research for genealogical and other purposes.

My interest in this bill was spurred by seeing the hundreds of unnamed graves in the MetFern Cemetery in Waltham. This cemetery contains the remains of people formerly institutionalized at the Metropolitan Hospital or Fernald School. I have long wondered about the real life stories of these people who were treated so cavalierly by a society and a state that locked them up in institutions and upon their deaths assigned them the final indignity of an unnamed grave.

Students at the nearby Gann Academy have done a wonderful job of discovering these people's stories but their research has been hampered by lack of access to records contained in the State Archives. This is a perfect example of why H.2779 is so necessary. Better access to old archival material would both give families of these individuals more information about their loved ones as well as help us all draw salutary lessons about the treatment of persons with disabilities.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Best regards,

Jonathan Hecht