CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

R. BRUCE JOSTEN
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
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May 30, 2007

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation representing more than three million businesses and organizations of every size, sector, and region, urges you to support S. 849, the "OPEN Government Act of 2007," which makes common sense reforms to the way federal agencies process requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

For 40 years, the business community has used FOIA to ensure access to and accountability from the federal government. In recent years, however, excessive processing delays have begun to significantly hamper FOIA's original purpose. Too often the public receives the documents they need too late, or not at all. Although FOIA requires federal agencies to respond to an information request within 20 days, it is not unusual for months or even years to elapse before a FOIA response is received. Until FOIA is reformed, the problem will continue to get worse.

This bipartisan bill, sponsored by Senator Leahy and Senator Cornyn, improves FOIA by creating an online tracking system for each FOIA request, creating an ombudsman to help facilitate FOIA requests, and, perhaps most importantly, imposing penalties on federal agencies for missing statutory deadlines. These changes, among others, will serve to increase agency accountability for FOIA decisions.

The OPEN Government Act of 2007 would restore FOIA's original purpose of providing the public with information in a timely and transparent manner, even while it continues to protect and exempt important business information. A companion bill, H.R. 1309, passed in the House of Representatives in March of this year.

The Chamber urges you to support this important legislation to improve FOIA and ensure openness and accountability from federal agencies.

Sincerely,

R. Bruce Josten