

# The Campaign for Freedom of Information

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## **EDM 845 – Government proposals to restrict the Freedom of Information Act**

I am writing to ask if you will support EDM 845 which calls on the government not to proceed with draft regulations to restrict use of the Freedom of Information Act. The EDM is sponsored by Tony Wright, Alan Beith, Dominic Grieve, Mark Fisher, Richard Shepherd and Simon Hughes.

The Constitutional Affairs select committee last year reported that the Act *“has already brought about the release of significant new information...[which] is being used in a constructive and positive way by a range of different individuals and organisations”* (HC 991). In its response the Government stated that it *“is pleased by the significant success that FOI represents...[and] will continue to build on that success”* (Cm 6937).

The Government is nevertheless proposing to make it considerably easier for authorities to reject FOI requests, regardless of their merits. According to a report commissioned by it:

- Some 120,000 FOI requests are currently dealt with each year across the whole the of the public sector. The Act's total cost is around £35.5 million annually.
- Up to 20,000 requests could be refused under the new proposals. The resulting savings would be less than £12 million annually.

The government has acknowledged that the proposals will have a greater effect on requests from journalists, MPs, campaign groups and researchers than from private individuals but has not attempted to assess their impact on the health of the legislation. We believe they are particularly likely to affect those requests which contribute to public debate on matters of concern and to the scrutiny of public authorities. The damage to the Act is likely to be out of all proportion to the relatively modest savings.

A more detailed briefing on the EDM is attached. I do hope you will feel able to sign it.

Yours sincerely

Maurice Frankel  
Director