



March 29, 2019

Assemblymember Laura Friedman
State Capitol
Room 2137
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 700

Dear Assemblymember Friedman:

We write in opposition to AB 700, legislation to weaken the California Public Records Act (CPRA). The legislation would exempt much of the work product of California's public universities from the CPRA. We oppose this legislation for many reasons.

The CPRA is a crucial tool for journalists and citizens, as well as public interest, consumer, environmental, public health and good government advocates in California and across the country to expose corruption, wrongdoing and abuse of power

There is no good reason to weaken the CPRA at all, but any successful effort to weaken it will invite any number of corporate or governmental interests to further undermine it, to weaken the power of California citizens to oversee our own government and to uncover corruption. This slippery slope is a perilous one for our health, environment and democracy; we urge you not to begin the slide.

At California's public universities, the CPRA is a vital means for uncovering many types of wrongdoing, including corporate corruption of science, hidden corporate influence in the research process, violations of research ethics standards, sexual harassment scandals, and the commercialization of the university. This effort to weaken the CPRA's reach into California's public universities will likely shield such scandals from exposure and accountability, and invite more. This is not in the interest of California citizens and taxpayers.

In our work at U.S. Right to Know investigating the food and agrichemical industries, we have used the CPRA, other state FOI laws, and the FOIA, scores of times to investigate the hidden corporate ties of university professors and researchers, and how corporate influences can harm consumers and public health. The documents from our public records requests have been featured in the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, AP, San Diego Union-Tribune, CBC, Mother Jones, Forbes, STAT, Le Monde, as well as medical and public health journals such as the BMJ, the Journal of Public Health Policy, and Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. We believe the world is a better place for these public records requests and the news coverage of them.

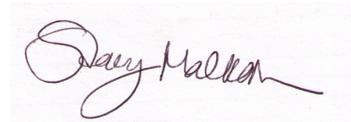
Exposing what the food industry *doesn't* want us to know

The potential harms of AB 700 should be especially clear after the two recent landmark Roundup cancer verdicts against Monsanto/Bayer, given the close ties that some UC Davis faculty have with them. It a proper use of the CPRA to investigate such corporate-university alliances, as we have done.

In particular, we believe that the provisions exempting from CPRA “correspondence” and “limited sharing of information” of public university researchers would be damaging to consumers and public health. But the legislation as a whole would do far more harm to consumers and public health than it is worth. There is no question that it is possible to abuse the CPRA. But the proper remedy is not to weaken the CPRA but rather to expose those who abuse it.

The CPRA and the citizens’ right to know properly extends into the correspondence of taxpayer-funded university researchers, and we hope you will keep it so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stacy Malkan".

Stacy Malkan
Co-director

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gary Ruskin".

Gary Ruskin
Co-director