



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony before the City Council Committee on Technology
Intro. 1235-2025 (Brewer)
City Hall – June 26, 2025

Dear members of the Committee on Technology.

My name is Ben Weinberg, and I am the Director of Public Policy at Citizens Union. I am submitting this testimony to express Citizens Union's support for Intro 1235-2025, sponsored by Council Member Gale Brewer, which would create a centralized system for processing Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests.

New York City government offers some of the most advanced tools for data transparency. Countless New Yorkers rely on platforms like NYC Open Data to find information about their city, DCP maps to learn about land use in their neighborhoods, and OpenRecords to access public records.

However, technological systems are only as strong as the information they contain. In New York City, accessing public records through FOIL requests is often hindered by long delays and a lack of responsiveness. In many cases, even when records are released, they are not made publicly available as open data.

A recent analysis by Reinvent Albany found that 16% of FOIL requests remained open for more than a year, with some agencies averaging over 400 days to close a request. Several agencies regularly miss response deadlines listed on the OpenRecords portal for the majority of requests they receive.

Worsening the issue, several major agencies—including the Human Resources Administration, the Department of Homeless Services, and NYCHA—do not use the OpenRecords portal at all. Additionally, many FOIL requests are filed outside the portal, making it difficult to get an accurate picture of FOIL compliance across city government.

Intro 1235 would standardize and codify FOIL reporting citywide, giving policymakers a clearer view of how agencies are complying with transparency laws. Critically, it would codify and expand the OpenRecords portal, which currently exists only through administrative decisions.

The bill would require all agencies to report FOIL requests through the portal and include information about the status of each request. Furthermore, it would require agencies to publicly post the records they release 14 days after they provided them to the original requestor.

As the number of FOIL requests continues to grow and agencies struggle to keep up, it is essential to improve oversight and accountability so we can improve compliance with the law. This legislation would strengthen transparency in city government and make FOIL a more effective tool for the public.