



March 20, 2017

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is the statewide trade association for print and digital news media in Pennsylvania, and counts more than 300 print, digital and related media organizations as members. On behalf of PNA's members, we write to urge an amendment to SB 523, which is scheduled for a vote before this committee tomorrow, to protect transparency and accountability.

SB 523, as drafted, would require all reports and records maintained by the Office of Victim Advocate (OVA) be confidential, privileged, and protected from subpoena, discovery, and the Right to Know Law. The broad wording of the proposed legislation could easily be construed to include, for example, all financial and operating documents, even if completely free of any personal information of victims and victim's families. We do not believe such broad protection should be afforded from disclosure requirements that are required of all other state agencies.

Robust protection for the confidentiality of records pertaining to victims and their families already exists under 18 P.S. § 11.709, and we agree that victim and claim-related information should continue to be protected. However, such protection against disclosure should not be extended to all reports, records, and information possessed or maintained by the OVA. This sort of protection would prevent public accountability and negatively impact public trust in government. We urge this committee to eliminate the new, overbroad provision and revert to the language in current law, relating to confidentiality of records.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this issue, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you in more detail. Please contact me at 717-385-0900 or hollyl@pa-news.org if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Holly Lubart
Director of Government Affairs