



## **You Can Handle the Truth!** The Campaign for Open Government

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### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Campaign for Open Government launches with report on BC Government's dismal Freedom of Information performance**

**Vancouver** – A broad-based coalition which includes the **Canadian Taxpayer's Federation**, **BC Civil Liberties Association**, **BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association** (FIPA), and many other groups, launched a campaign today to ensure BC's government fulfils its long-overdue promise to be a Canadian leader in openness and accountability.

The Campaign for Open Government is focusing on the Province's poor record of response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The FOI Act allows citizens and organizations to request copies of government documents.

"Our tax dollars pay for all government reports, memos, policy analysis, everything. If citizens pay for it, they have a right to know what it is," said Sara MacIntyre of the Canadian Taxpayers Association.

"In 2004 a Committee of the Legislature reviewed the FOI Act and recommended amendments that were applauded by academics, activists, media organizations and citizens," commented Darrell Evans of FIPA. "To date, the government has ignored these recommendations completely. On the other hand, they have made a large number of amendments and procedural changes that have made it more difficult and time consuming to obtain information."

The campaign is calling on the government to implement the Special Committee's recommendations, increase funding to ensure FOI requests are dealt with in a timely manner, and address the "culture of denial" in Victoria, typified by constant attempts by staff to stall FOI requests considered harmful to the government.

At the campaign launch, a report titled **ACCESS DENIED: An analysis of the BC Government's response to freedom of information requests, 2000-2005** was released. Some of the findings in the report are:

- Almost 50% of general information requests between 2000 and 2005 failed to receive a response within the mandatory time lines laid out in the Act;
- From 2000 to 2004, response times increased by 25%; and
- The proportion of information requests abandoned (usually in frustration) by the public tripled to 15% of all requests in the period 2000 to 2004.

The study was commissioned by FIPA and sponsored by the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA) and the BC Government Employees Union.

"In today's political climate of scandals and dropping citizen participation, the BC government needs to raise the bar for other governments in Canada and improve its response to FOI requests." Stated David Gollob, Vice President of Public Affairs for the CNA.

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