



**State Senator  
Kirk Watson  
District 14**

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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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## **Watson gives new life to bills that close loopholes in open records law**

Sen. Kirk Watson on Thursday revived several bills that restore access to public information in the wake of recent court decisions that have undermined the Texas Public Information Act.

Legislation to ensure access to public information has drawn considerable bipartisan support in both chambers this session. But powerful special interests have been working to kill the bills because they would like to continue spending taxpayer dollars without any oversight from taxpayers. These special interests have kept the bills bottled up in the House Government Transparency and Operation Committee.

In a last-ditch effort to protect access to public information, Sen. Watson added the language of six important bills related to the Public Information Act to House Bill 2328. This maneuver will allow the full House of Representatives to decide if Texans should have access to information, such as final public contracts, that has been available for decades.

"My colleagues in the Texas Senate sent a very strong statement about our commitment to open government and transparency," Sen. Kirk Watson said. "If Texans are to hold their public officials accountable, access to public information is essential. We can't let the special interests who benefit from government dollars dictate what we as taxpayers can see."

House Bill 2328 by Rep. Eddie Lucio III creates an expedited process for responding to Public Information Act requests. The Texas Senate voted to add six measures to HB 2328:

- SB 407 by Watson/Capriglione: Reverses the *Boeing* decision to ensure the public can access government contracts.
- SB 408 by Watson/Capriglione: Reverses the *Greater Houston Partnership* decision, which currently allows private entities supported by public funds to operate in the dark.
- SB 1655 by Watson/Elkins: Specifies which disclosure exceptions can be raised by a governmental body that has violated the PIA's procedures.
- HB 2670 by Hunter/Watson: Ensures governmental bodies may recover public information from their employees' private devices.
- HB 2710 by Hunter/Watson: Restores a longstanding AG opinion that dates of birth cannot be withheld from otherwise public documents based solely on common law privacy.
- HB 3848 by Hunter/Watson: Requires governmental bodies to respond to all PIA requests; ensures requestors can obtain public information on portable computer drives; and requires governmental bodies to list the specific exceptions that they think apply to a PIA request.

The House of Representative will have the final vote on the changes.