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H.762 An Act Providing Against Compelled Disclosure of Certain Information by the News Media
“Free Flow of Information Act”
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
October 16, 2017

Chairman Brownsberger, Chairwoman Cronin, members of the Committee, my name is Jordan Walton and I am the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Broadcasters Association. On behalf of our radio and television broadcasters, I thank you for allowing us the opportunity to speak in favor of H.762 – The Free Flow of Information Act.

Broadcast Journalist Walter Cronkite once said, “Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy. It *is* democracy.” Freedom of the press is so important that the Founding Fathers found it necessary to include it in the first amendment to the Constitution.

More than 200 years later, investigative reporting remains a pillar of broadcasters’ commitment to serving in the public interest and maintaining a strong democracy. At times, that reporting requires information to be obtained from confidential sources.

While most journalists would prefer that all the information they acquire be “on the record,” there are times, like when exposing corporate wrongdoing or criminal activities, where a source insists on remaining anonymous. These witnesses often fear for their jobs, or even their safety.

Compelling a journalist to name these sources not only exposes these witnesses possibly putting them in harm’s way, but it also acts to deter future witnesses from coming forward and shedding light on situations that our viewers and listeners need to know. Without people willing to speak out about wrongdoing and without journalists that can protect these people’s anonymity, Massachusetts and its citizens suffer.

Maintaining the free flow of information through the media is a key check and balance in our society that needs to be fully protected. This common-sense legislation would bring Massachusetts in line with the 41 other states that have already passed “reporter shield” legislation. I urge this committee to act now and send this bill favorably out of committee.

Thank you for your time.