



June 17, 2025

VIA PORTAL

Honorable Thomas Umberg, Chair
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
1021 O Street, Room 3240
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SUPPORT — AB 1524 (Committee on the Judiciary)

Dear Chair Umberg:

The First Amendment Coalition and the undersigned organizations are pleased to support AB 1524 (Assembly Judiciary), which would reduce financial barriers to court records by ensuring members of the press and public can make copies of state trial court records without incurring high costs.

AB 1524 is needed to resolve inconsistent practices and policies of Superior Courts. Currently, when members of the press or public visit a court's clerk's office or a records room to exercise their right of access to nonconfidential court records, they are often forced to pay costs of \$0.50 per page for copies of records. Our staff hears of this concern from members of the press and others who use our free educational resources to learn about their right to government records.

Reporters and editors across the state have encountered courts that have formal policies or enforced practices preventing them from taking a photograph of a public court record they have inspected on premises — either on digital copy viewed at a public access computer terminal or a paper record court staff has retrieved. This often presents an untenable choice: pay high costs to the court or leave without a copy of the record — a record that may only be available at the physical premises of the courthouse, as many court California court records are not available online. Staff of the First Amendment Coalition have also experienced this when inspecting records in multiple courthouses.

For most of the public, and for many journalists who do the important work of informing the public about developments in our courts, such copying fees are in practical effect a barrier to meaningful access to court records.

The Legislature recognized the importance of the press and public being able to use their own devices — such as cameras, scanners, or any other technology — to make copies of disclosable public records when it passed [AB 1819](#) (Assembly Judiciary) (codified at Gov. Code § 7922.530) in 2019. AB 1819 ensured that any person who accessed a record disclosable under the California Public Records Act had a right to use the requester's own equipment on the premises of the public agency to photograph or otherwise copy or reproduce the record, while allowing the agency to impose reasonable limits to maintain the integrity of documents and

orderly function of the agency and its employees. AB 1524 simply does the same for case records maintained by state trial courts.

AB 1524 will ensure the public isn't priced out of public records and ensure journalists can do the important work of keeping Californians informed. And we are certain that through continued conversations with stakeholders, this bill properly balances the public's interest with courts' interest in being able to still regulate electronic device use consistent with security and privacy needs.

For these reasons, we are proud to support AB 1524. We appreciate the committee's attention to this issue.

Very truly yours,

FIRST AMENDMENT COALITION



Ginny LaRoe
Advocacy Director

cc: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on the Judiciary
Amanda Mattson, Senate Committee on the Judiciary

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