

# MUCKROCK

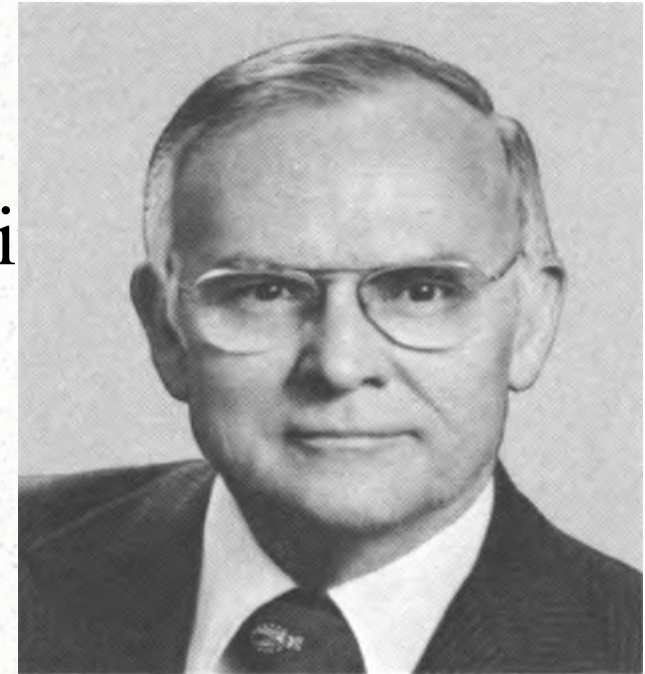
**The Freedom of Information Act and  
You: An OpenData Love Story**

# Basics: What is FOIA

- Freedom of Information Act – specific thing, general meaning
- Federal (FOIA), State and Local (State Public Records Law – FOIL, OPRA, Etc.)
- Basic gist – records generated by government are public records, and therefore belong to the public

# Super-Brief History

- LBJ signed FOIA into law in 1966, after a decade of pestering by CA Rep. John Moss
- Not originally related to Watergate, but Privacy Act amendment of 1974 was, and gave it the scope it currently has
- States followed suit with own variations



# What Kind of Records Are We Talking About?

- Forms, **Manuals**, Policy, etc.
- Letters, Memos, **Emails**
- **Source Code**, Websites, Metadata
- Processing notes for requests

# What CAN'T You Get

- Personal Info – SSN, Medical Records, etc.
- Want somebody's FBI file? Ask their permission, or wait till they're dead
- No national security secrets, or anything that would “put people at risk”
- Also, wells

# Caveat Requestor

- Ironically, the Freedom of Information Act is **not free** - MBTA is especially **bad about this**
- Delays – State Department takes years, **USMS' busted hard drive**
- Redactions/Sanitation – **Sobering/Snowden/ Snackcar**

# Who Uses FOIA?

- Commercial (Patents, Personal data) – 95%
- Journalists/Researchers – 4%
- Everybody Else - 1%

# Who Should?

- You, obviously
- Activists – ARIC docs
- Bodycams, Stingrays, Spotshotters
- You're being watched – might as well know what they're looking at



# Who Are We?

- A group of journalists who want to increase access to and grow awareness of public records
- Give tools and show how they can be used
- Started by these dorks
- Subscription model



# Our FOIA Work

- National – 1033 Program and Private Prisons
- State – ALPR and Gasleaks
- Local – Olympics and Smoking
- NOT LEAKS

# Putting the Fun in Fundamental Basis of Democracy

- CIA Cafeteria Complaints
- Insane Clown Posse FBI file
- T. Markey

# File a Request, Q and A

- What it says on tin
- Also, side note – Massachusetts is absolutely the worst
- Seriously, the worst - SFI