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Gatehouse Media Editorial: Stepping up for records reform

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First the state Legislature took a swing at fixing the Massachusetts Public Records Law, a statute that is limited and weak. The law requires state agencies and municipal governments to make official documents available to citizens upon request, but some officials obstruct, delay or impose exorbitant fees on the release of documents. In June, a state Senate committee approved a bill reforming the law, giving it some much needed teeth. But then legislators started hearing from lobbyists, so the bill stalled.

In July, Gov. Charlie Baker stepped to the plate, announcing that each agency will designate a records access officer to coordinate public records requests. Even better, some of the more popular public records will be easily accessible and even searchable in electronic form. Still, these are minimal changes to one of the weakest public records laws in the nation. The new rules will apply only to the executive branch and aren't codified into law. The next governor could reverse course.

Now Secretary of State William Galvin has taken his turn at the plate. Galvin submitted language and signatures to put public records reform on the 2016 ballot. The greatest value in Galvin's proposal is the incentive it gives legislators to act on the bill before it.

The Legislature gets another turn at the plate when it returns to formal sessions in September. It must not further weaken an already modest set of reforms, and it should not require a referendum campaign to force it to act.

We appreciate the efforts of Baker and Galvin. Now it's up to House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Stan Rosenberg to deliver a home run for government transparency and accountability.

*Let's hit a home
run for transparency!*