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Testimony of the Trial Lawyers Association of Metropolitan Washington, D.C.
Bill 18-777 "Open Government Act of 2010"

Public Hearing: June 7, 2010
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment
(Chairperson, Councilmember Cheh)

Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh and members of the Committee. I am Salvatore Zambri, Past-President of the Trial Lawyers Association of Metropolitan Washington, D.C., and I am pleased to be here to speak to you about Bill 18-777.

The Open Government Office, created by this legislation, would greatly assist the citizens of the District in many ways, including providing citizens with public documents in a more timely manner, facilitating the determination of accountability on matters at issue, and by otherwise assuring that the process is open and fairly managed.

The District of Columbia has been plagued in years past with the inability to fulfill lawful FOIA requests in a timely manner. By establishing an office to which citizens can direct questions and seek redress, when necessary, the pending legislation promotes and open and efficient government for the people of this city.

The attorneys of our association routinely request the production of documents pursuant to the applicable FOIA statute. At times, and all-too-often, it is very difficult for our members to obtain the responsive documents in a timely manner. We welcome the passage of legislation to improve the FOIA process.

Our association appreciates your leadership in this matter and for bringing the bill to a public hearing. I am available to provide any assistance to the Committee should you believe my assistance would be useful to your effort to advance this important legislation.

Thank you.