

Testimony of Brett Davis regarding HB 2872, Budget Sunshine Act

Good afternoon, Madame Chair and Members of the Committee. I am Brett Davis, an Economic Policy analyst with the Evergreen Freedom Foundation. I'd like to thank Representative Gary Alexander for the invitation to testify on this bill.

We believe the Budget Sunshine Act would improve transparency and accountability in state government, and may also improve the quality of proposed legislation as it pertains to the budget.

The current budget process is rushed, leaving little time for legislators and members of the public to review the document before a public hearing or vote is held. During most years, a press conference is held when the budget is publicly unveiled, but no one may read the budget proposals until the press conference is over. A few hours later, the originating budget committee holds a public hearing, and the appropriate legislative chamber—House or Senate—votes on the proposal one or two days later.

In fact, other than members of the Appropriations and Ways & Means committees, most legislators do not have time to read the budget bill before a vote is held, meaning there is a real possibility that legislators may come to regret their votes once learning additional details about the budget.

This limited amount of time for public review of the budget is curious, given that Article 1, Section 1 of Washington's Constitution establishes that "All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed..." In practice, the state's rushed budget process does not recognize the sovereignty of the people, since they are not given adequate time to review and comment on legislative priorities before they are voted into law.

Meanwhile, 23 states have constitutional or statutory provisions that lay out the minimum time the legislature must review the budget before a vote, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The state budget is the most important piece of legislation, because it drives all policy within a state. For this reason, the American Legislative Exchange Council supports a 72-hour timeout policy for state budgets similar to what is being proposed in this bill.

We at the Freedom Foundation believe it serves the public interest when citizens are given time to look over the budget and give their input before it is passed by the Legislature. If the Legislature believes that as well, then the Budget Sunshine Act will help accomplish that.