

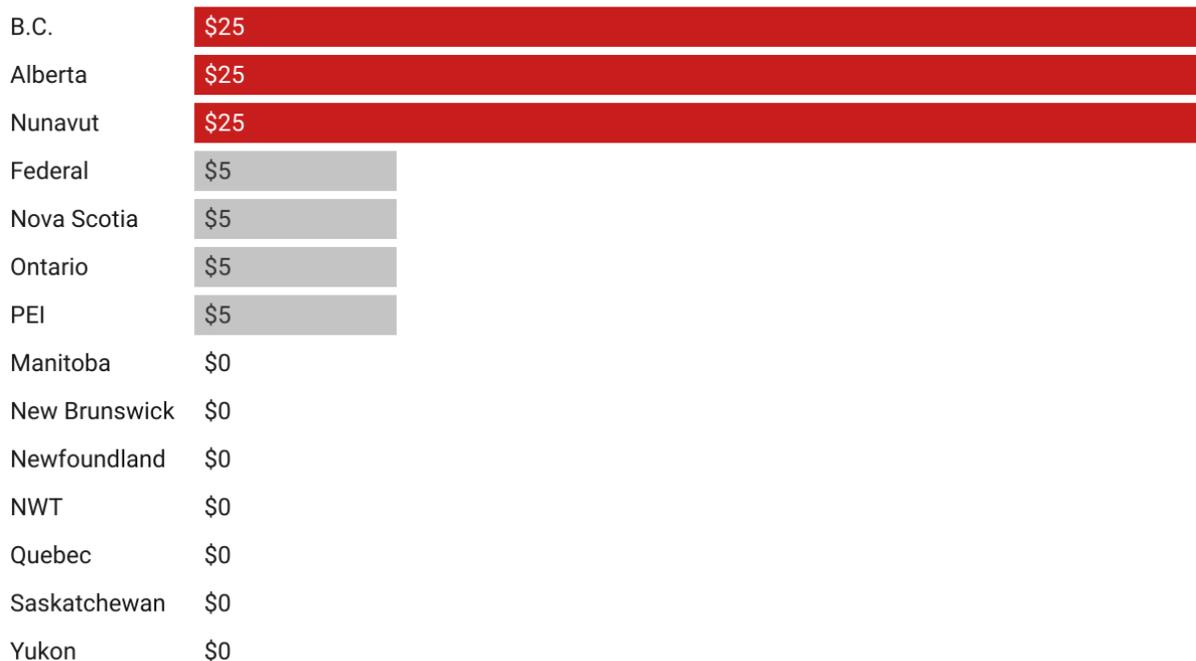
October 21, 2021

Lisa Beare  
Minister of Citizens' Services  
Government of British Columbia

Minister Beare:

As journalism educators, we are deeply disappointed by the B.C. government's plans to begin charging a \$25 fee to file a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. B.C.'s proposed fee would be 5 times as high as a federal request (\$5) and the highest fee in the country, tied with Alberta and Nunavut.

## B.C. plans to adopt the highest FOI fees in Canada



We believe this new fee will be particularly onerous for student journalists, who often use FOI requests to uncover newsworthy information which they then publish through student newspapers. Requiring students who are already struggling to pay for tuition and textbooks to pay \$25 every time they want to access government records will discourage many of them from making such requests.

Journalists, activists and members of the public use FOI requests to hold the government accountable and help inform their fellow citizens. The value to the public of the information uncovered by FOI requests is perhaps best illustrated by the fact your own government publishes all the information released in response to FOI requests online, so all citizens can access it (<https://bit.ly/foisbc>).

We appreciate that some people may abuse the FOI system, placing undue pressure on government resources. But there are better ways of dealing with that challenge than a blanket \$25 fee. The Act already allows government agencies to charge requesters for any search that takes longer than 3 hours. And the government could impose a fee on requesters who make more than, say, 100 requests a year.

This new fee is a step backward for government transparency and openness and is particularly unfair to requesters of limited means, like students. We strongly urge you not to adopt this fee.

Sincerely,

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