The case for Proposition B is not as simple as the proponents say. Prop. B is a hollow effort to protect privacy. It would, however, hand our elected officials the power to tamper with San Francisco’s voter-enacted Sunshine Ordinance.

We agree that privacy should be protected. But far from being a catch-all privacy shield, Prop. B wouldn’t give our elected officials the authority to do much, if anything, to protect privacy that they can’t do already. Instead, it would set a vague privacy agenda for our elected officials to implement in the future, without any direct input from you, the voter. There is no telling what the result would be.

We oppose authorizing our elected officials to unilaterally tamper with the Sunshine Ordinance, San Francisco’s voter-enacted open government law. As James Madison, one of the founding fathers of our nation, once said: “Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” We need a strong Sunshine Ordinance to ensure that we, not our elected officials, have the final say over how San Francisco is run.

Prop. B threatens San Francisco’s Sunshine Ordinance — the very policy that ensures the public can hold elected officials and civil servants accountable. We urge you to vote NO.

Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California Chapter
Opponent’s Argument Against Proposition B

Proposition B threatens San Francisco’s landmark Sunshine Ordinance by giving elected officials unilateral authority to gut it. We urge you to vote no.

Maintaining public access to government information keeps public officials and civil servants accountable for their actions. In addition to providing citizens access to government records and open meetings, the voter-approved Sunshine Ordinance created an independent body, the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force, to ensure that city officials actually follow transparency laws.

Prop. B would empower city officials to amend the Sunshine Ordinance, so long as the change is “not inconsistent” with the “purpose or intent” of the law. This wording is vague, and could enable officials to limit access to government records or change the composition of the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force to be more friendly to politicians or the very business interests they say they are trying to rein in.

Although it’s aimed to address a real problem, Prop. B is largely a statement of abstract guidelines that could have harmful unintended consequences. Officials say they would not use the amendment to impede access, and that we should trust them to use their newfound powers judiciously. But that contradicts the basis of our transparency laws, which ensure the public’s ability to hold government officials accountable.

Politicians shouldn’t be handed the ability to block the public’s right to know what happens at City Hall — our right to know how the city runs and how it spends our tax dollars. We urge you to vote NO on Prop. B.

Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California Chapter

Rebuttal to Opponent’s Argument Against Proposition B

Any notion that public records laws may be weakened is not only legally impossible, it is a distraction from the important privacy rights that Proposition B would advance.

We agree that public access to government information helps keep public officials accountable for their actions. That is why Proposition B explicitly states that it may not be implemented to undermine the Sunshine Ordinance or any other public records law.

Public records advocates also agree that the Sunshine Ordinance, passed by the voters in 1999, is out of date. From defunct appointing authorities that may only be fixed by going back to the voters, to issues accessing digital records as technology continues to evolve, the Sunshine Ordinance must be fixed to increase transparency and access to public records.

This is why Proposition B actually restricts the Board of Supervisors to amending public records laws in order to strengthen them and to hold public officials - including the Board of Supervisors - accountable.

In spite of this peculiar opposition, we look forward to advancing your privacy rights - and your access to public records.

Vote Yes on Prop B, and put your Privacy First.

Aaron Peskin, Supervisor, District 3