

# Justice Aide Opposes Information Bill

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WASHINGTON, June 12—The Department of Justice officially opposed today Legislation designed to encourage Federal employees to make public any evidence of waste and corruption in Government agencies without fear of retaliation by their superiors.

Mary C. Lawton, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, told a Senate subcommittee hearing that the department agreed with the "objectives" of the bill but her formal statement criticized virtually every provision in it.

The measure, sponsored by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, would bar disciplining of Government workers who give the press information that an agency is required to make public. The bill would also give an employe who did so the right to go to court to prevent harassment.

Speaking for the Justice Department, Miss Lawton said that "we do not find a need for the rights granted by this bill," and that "we do not believe that employes should be immunized against the unauthorized disclosure of information through the bypassing of the administrative process."

But Ralph Nader, the consumer advocate, and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press told the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Administrative Practice that the bill did not go far enough in eliminating bureaucratic obstruction of information and insuring "truth in government."

Calling for stronger penalties for Government officials who suppress legitimate public information, Mr. Nader said that the Kennedy bill served to counteract the proposed revision of the Federal Criminal Code and that, if passed by Congress, it would "further insulate Government officials who violate their accountability to the public."

## Broader Bill Urged

Jack C. Landau, a director of the reporters committee, called for broader legislation that would permit release of information that an official or agency was disobeying the laws or the Constitution or that the Government was taking actions that were contrary to its public policy statements.

The Kennedy bill would protect Government employes only against releasing information that should be available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act. This

does not cover national security information, such as illegal operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Senator Kennedy, who presided at the hearing as the subcommittee's chairman, said he could not understand why the Justice Department had not moved to protect the rights of a series of Federal employes who were brave and conscientious enough to expose wrongdoing in the Government.

Miss Lawton said the Justice Department objected to the Kennedy bill on the ground that it "makes every employe, regardless of position or relationship to the information, the final authority as to what information shall be released to the public."

She told the subcommittee that the measure would deny the President his constitutional right "to control executive branch information" and vest it "in some three million Federal employes instead."

Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Senate minority floor leader, suggested that civil servants should "go through the system first" in some form of agency hearing before gaining protection against their release of information, even though the public had a right to it.