As the Legislature returns from summer recess, all eyes are on the Appropriations committees, which will make cut-throat, secret calls on whether a bill will live or die.

Two bills before appropriations committees in the Senate and Assembly, SB 1421 and AB 748, will be scrutinized based on the fiscal burden they impose. Whatever costs are affixed to them, they are a bargain and should be passed.

SB 1421 would require public disclosure of certain police disciplinary records: when officers use serious or deadly force, or when they are subject to sustained findings of misconduct based on sexual assault or lying, crimes that represent a serious abuse of their power.

AB 748 would require the release of video or audio recordings, like body camera footage, that depict an officer’s serious use of force or misconduct.

In most states, these files are available in some form to the public. But two laws in California keep them completely shrouded in secrecy indefinitely. The laws, driven by law enforcement lobbyists who [wield significant power](https://calmatters.org/articles/progressive-democrats-run-california-yet-it-does-more-than-many-states-to-shield-police-from-scrutiny/), have proven costly for taxpayers and damaging to public trust.

The appropriations committee will consider the cost of producing body camera and other video footage, which agencies in the state argue is a significant burden. But the fact is that the California Public Records Act imposes an inherent burden on all government entities to produce records they hold.

In 2014, voters approved Proposition 42 based on the idea that agencies must internalize the costs of producing public records because it is one of the core responsibilities of democratic institutions. This was done to ensure “taxpayers are not paying for items local governments have a duty to provide on their own.” As Thomas Jefferson said, “Information is the currency of democracy.” The people, not the government, ought to decide what we need to know.

Evidence that disclosure requirements will impose costs on police agencies cannot justify the continued state of secrecy that leaves families and the public without answers when people die at the hands of police. All state and local agencies except law enforcement already have to disclose records about serious misconduct of public employees.

As the Los Angeles Times [reported](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-city-payouts-20180627-story.html), the cost of police uses of force are already borne by public

agencies, and ultimately, the taxpayers in the form of legal payouts. Last budget year, the city of Los Angeles paid out more than $200 million in legal settlements and court judgments, more than 40% of which were related to legal battles involving the Los Angeles Police Department, including a rash of recent settlements over police shootings and wrongful imprisonment.

All aspects of police activity costs the taxpayers money. The cost in providing a modicum of transparency should not stop the Legislature from doing the right thing and reforming the law to mandate greater public disclosure of police records.