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Open government and media groups commend move to dismiss charges against Fannin County journalist jailed for requesting public records

ATLANTA—July 7, 2016—A prosecutor’s move to dismiss charges against a Fannin County newspaper publisher jailed after requesting public records is the right call, say a group of Georgia government transparency and media organizations that two days ago demanded the charges be dropped.

The Georgia First Amendment Foundation, Atlanta Press Club and the Georgia Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists commend Appalachian Judicial Circuit District Attorney Alison Sosebee’s July 7 [request for dismissal of charges](#) against Mark Thomason, publisher of the *Fannin Focus* in Blue Ridge. Thomason was arrested on June 24 and charged with attempted identity fraud, identity fraud and making a false statement after he filed an open records request for copies of certain checks documenting spending from judicial operating accounts.

Sosebee’s motion for dismissal included a letter from Appalachian Judicial Circuit Superior Court Chief Judge Brenda Weaver, who was named on one of the accounts included in Thomason’s open records request and initially had pushed for the indictments against the journalist. In the letter, dated July 6, Weaver acknowledged that protecting citizens’ rights to report on perceived wrongs is important to “the integrity of our system of government.” She urged the district attorney to dismiss the matter.

“As a citizen and certainly as a Judge, I in no way want to diminish or infringe upon the First Amendment Rights we have under the Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of the State of Georgia,” Weaver wrote in the letter.

Weaver’s acknowledgement and the district attorney’s request for dismissal of charges are victories for government transparency and the exercise of First Amendment rights for all Georgia citizens. The dismissal of these charges would affirm the principle that seeking public records should never be considered a crime.

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