

Ex-FOI officer wants to reduce or scrap fees

By JEFFREY SIMPSON Staff Reporter

October 2006

The province's former review officer for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is urging politicians in the legislature to reduce or scrap fees charged for requests.

Darce Fardy, who has organized a group called the Right to Know Coalition, said Monday that the act's \$25 application fee and \$25 appeal fee are the highest in the country and are allowing the government to keep public information under wraps.

"The fees are a deterrent," Mr. Fardy said in an interview Monday.

Mr. Fardy, who retired as Nova Scotia's review officer earlier this year, said his coalition has sent letters to Justice Minister Murray Scott, along with the NDP and Liberals.

"It's a fundamental right," Mr. Fardy said. "You can't have good government without open government and the secrecy that surrounds the bureaucracy.

"Somebody has to kind of fight that to the best of their ability. And I think it's a good cause and I'm keen on getting people interested in it."

Mr. Fardy said he has spoken to many people in the province who are discouraged from using the act to obtain information they want because they can't afford to pay the \$25.

Mr. Fardy said he'd like to see the application fees reduced to at least \$5 and requests for reviews made free, which was the status up until the Tories jacked up the costs a few years ago.

The Nova Scotia government's penchant for secrecy earned it the Canadian Association of Journalists' Code of Silence Award in 2003. The province won that dubious distinction after imposing the highest fees in Canada for access-to-information queries, which resulted in fewer requests.

Justice Minister Murray Scott said his department is reviewing fees across the country and will then decide whether to make a change here.

"I would like to see us ensure we have a fair process for people to get the information from government that they think they should have and we believe they should have," he said.

(jsimpson@herald.ca)

With David Jackson, provincial reporter

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/NovaScotia/537668.html>