

# Access Bill backers looking for the fax

By JOHN  
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SUPPORTERS of Christine Loh Kung-wai's Access to Information Bill sent 25 fax messages to the Governor within 1½ days of her call to keep the Government House fax machines busy.

"I'm very pleased with the number sent so far, but if Chris Patten received 100 or 200 more he'd obviously be pretty annoyed," Ms Loh, the independent legislator, said yesterday.

Government House spokesman Mike Hanson confirmed the receipt of the 25 faxes, but was unable to say whether the Governor had personally seen them.

It is standard bureaucratic practice for Private Secretaries to decide which documents should physically be passed on.

The Private Member's Bill would give the public the legal right to seek information from Government departments and related bodies, and to amend records that contained errors or were misleading.

The Governor's consent is required before the Bill can be debated by Legco because implementing its provisions would entail government expenditure.

Mr Patten's position has been that specific access to specific documents is a better approach than comprehensive legislation.

"The distinction is that the Government is offering administrative means, and we are calling for legislative rights," said Ms Loh.

"Even if you can't digest the whole Bill, we're asking the public to agree with one basic concept."

The three sponsors of the Bill, Ms Loh, Simon Ip Sik-on and Jimmy McGregor, will meet with co-strategists today to finalise plans for a three-strand campaign to push the message further into the public domain.

"First, we need to get the civil service to understand this Bill. I'm very happy that our visiting experts, who have practical experience of this type of legislation in action, have been talking to

branches of Government including Economic Services, Finance and the Central Policy Unit.

"Then there is Legco. This is probably the easiest part because I already have over half the members prepared to support my call for the Governor let the Bill be tabled.

"The broader campaign is to take the message in the Bill to the man in the street, and to the community.

"The fax message has been translated into Chinese, and a poster and pamphlet campaign will be launched at the end of the month using cartoon figures and written in colloquial Cantonese," said Ms Loh.

Ms Loh launched the fax campaign at a seminar on Sunday, attended by international academics, constitutional and civil rights lawyers and journalists.

Hong Kong Journalists' Association will be sending draft letters to its members urging them to support the move.