President Obama Signs S. 337 Freedom on Information Act Reform Into Law
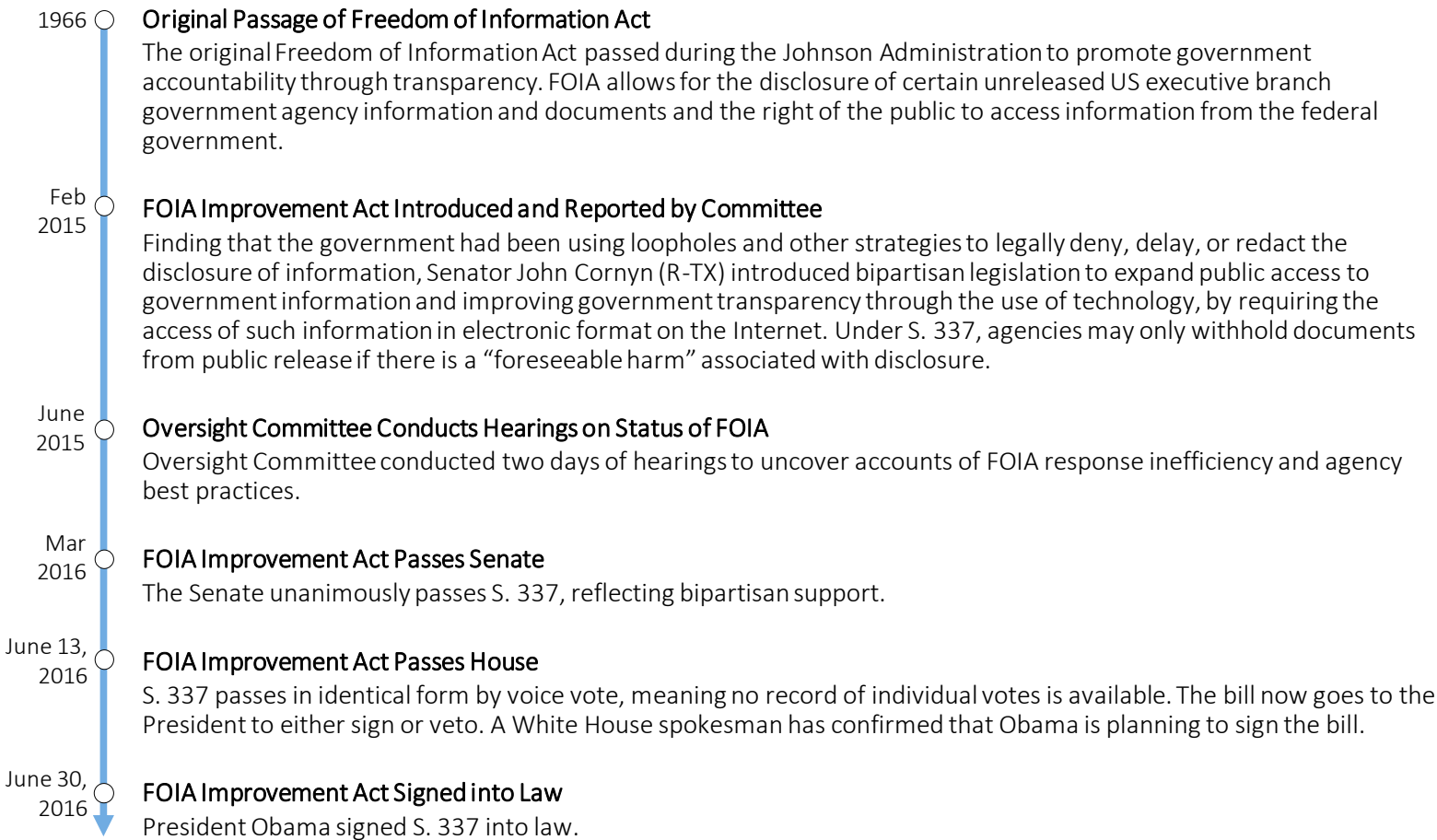
Timeline of the Freedom of Information Act

1966 — **Original Passage of Freedom of Information Act**

The original Freedom of Information Act passed during the Johnson Administration to promote government accountability through transparency. FOIA allows for the disclosure of certain unreleased US executive branch government agency information and documents and the right of the public to access information from the federal government.

Feb 2015 — **FOIA Improvement Act Introduced and Reported by Committee**

Finding that the government had been using loopholes and other strategies to legally deny, delay, or redact the disclosure of information, Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced bipartisan legislation to expand public access to government information and improving government transparency through the use of technology, by requiring the access of such information in electronic format on the Internet. Under S. 337, agencies may only withhold documents from public release if there is a "foreseeable harm" associated with disclosure.

June 2015 — **Oversight Committee Conducts Hearings on Status of FOIA**

Oversight Committee conducted two days of hearings to uncover accounts of FOIA response inefficiency and agency best practices.

Mar 2016 — **FOIA Improvement Act Passes Senate**

The Senate unanimously passes S. 337, reflecting bipartisan support.

June 13, 2016 — **FOIA Improvement Act Passes House**

S. 337 passes in identical form by voice vote, meaning no record of individual votes is available. The bill now goes to the President to either sign or veto. A White House spokesman has confirmed that Obama is planning to sign the bill.

June 30, 2016 — **FOIA Improvement Act Signed into Law**

President Obama signed S. 337 into law.

Sources: "Summary: S. 337 – 114th Congress," Congress.gov, 2016; Josh Gerstein, "FOIA Reform Bill Headed to Obama, June 13, 2016; Alex Howard, "Celebrating Freedom of Information Reform in Congress, and the Road Ahead," Sunlight Foundation, June 14, 2016; 5 U.S. Code § 552, Legal Information Institute, 2016.