This Independence Day marks the anniversary of another freedom – the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). On July 4, 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson signed FOIA into law. A year later, the act went into effect giving private citizens a “right to know” by providing a streamlined means to request government records.

Pro or con, to redact or release – it’s time to acknowledge the hardworking people who have kept the doors of democracy open for fifty years. On this golden anniversary, AINS salutes Access Professionals across the public sector. Those front-line staffers who responded to 769,903 FOIA Requests in 2015. Professionals who rose to the occasion to manage a 30% increase in requests since 2008. These are the unsung heroes that protect our liberty one piece of paper at a time.

“FOIA offices have an important task. They are a vital part of democracy by keeping the government transparent. They serve the government, their agency and citizens.” said Moe Goswami, CEO of AINS Inc. the maker of FOIAxpress®, the leading eFOIA solution for the Federal Government.

In 2016, the fifty year law is taking center stage. Savvier citizens have come to expect transparency; they demand a greater level of accountability and access to a broader range of government information and records – from standard reports to video, emails, social media and new forms of communication. “FOIA is only going to get more complicated. Social media and technology are changing the way people interact; more content is going digital. They (FOIA Offices) are going to need greater levels of support and expertise in order to meet the growing demand” said Goswami. “Despite a greater burden on the FOIA community, it is positive that FOIA is growing. A transparent government is the cornerstone of our democracy.”

So, this July 4th, raise a sparkler for the Access Professional. To the analyst, lawyer, public information director and Chief FOIA Officer who respond to media requests, citizen questions and uphold the First Amendment. To the people who search, redact and respond on demand – walking the tightrope between disclosing too much and safeguarding our nation. These quiet champions deserve a nod for keeping the lines of communication open for half a century. Happy July 4th!