

"A man should look for what is, and not for what he thinks should be." *Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist, philosopher*

# Urge passage of Sunshine in Government Act

**BRADENTON HERALD EDITORIAL | Legislation strengthens Florida's public access laws**

Legislation winding through various House and Senate committees strengthens Florida's Sunshine Laws and adopts the recommendations by Gov. Charlie Crist's Commission on Open Government Reform. While the state enjoys some of the strongest government transparency laws in the nation, greater access to public records can and should be set into statutes.

Senate Bill 1598 and House Bill 1211 establish the Sunshine in Government Act and accomplish sweeping reforms by integrating public

meetings and records laws into one section. The bills also establish standards on the costs governments can charge for duplicating records and bans any charge for copying work that takes less than a half hour.

The latter provision will tear down one of the roadblocks that officials can erect to make compliance onerous and costly for citizen activists. Current state law allows government to charge "excessive use" fees but there are no standards determining what constitutes "excessive."

## Online Extras

At [www.bradenton.com/opinion](http://www.bradenton.com/opinion)

- 'No Child' should be left behind, but Obama must ensure teachers get support
- Radical new ideas needed to get NCAA graduation rates up
- Will a king's death kill Thailand's democracy?

A government official could abuse this by placing burdensome charges on a public records request deemed to be intrusive and objectionable — even though citizens can access any public document they wish. SB 1598 establish-

es rates — up to 15 cents per one-side page and 20 cents per two-sided page — and thus takes away that ability to thwart access. The bills also forbid agencies from charging additional fees for redacting personal information contained in public records.

An essential provision is the requirement that public officials attend training on Florida's Sunshine laws. Ignorance of the law is an ongoing problem with many elected and appointed officials, and violations can result in expensive lawsuits that taxpayers must pay.

Earlier this month, Bradenton Beach city commissioners wisely dismissed three

appointees who failed to attend an educational seminar as requested. Taxpayers should not be put at risk over an official's lack of knowledge or compliance with Sunshine laws.

When government fails to conduct the public's business out in the open or attempts to stymie citizen access to public records, we must suspect officials are covering up malfeasance and we must demand access to determine the validity of that conclusion. The Sunshine in Government Act will strengthen citizens' ability to hold government accountable. We recommend you contact our area legislators and urge passage.

## Contacting legislators

- Sen. Mike Bennett**, 21st Senatorial District, Republican, (941) 727-6349; [bennett.mike.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:bennett.mike.web@flsenate.gov)
- Rep. Ron Reagan**, District 67, Republican, (941) 727-6447, [ron.reagan@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:ron.reagan@myfloridahouse.gov)
- Rep. Bill Galvano**, District 68, Republican, (941) 708-4968, [bill.galvano@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:bill.galvano@myfloridahouse.gov)
- Rep. Keith Fitzgerald**, District 69, Democrat, (941) 955-8077, [keith.fitzgerald@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:keith.fitzgerald@myfloridahouse.gov)
- Sen. Arthenia Joyner**, 18th Senatorial District, Democrat, (813) 233-4277, [joyner.arthenia.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:arthenia.web@flsenate.gov)
- Sen. Nancy Detert**, 23rd Senatorial District, Republican, (941) 480-3547, [detert.nancy.web@flsenate.gov](mailto:detert.nancy.web@flsenate.gov)
- Rep. Darryl Rouson**, District 55, Democrat, (727) 552-1370, [darryl.rouson@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:darryl.rouson@myfloridahouse.gov)