

Know how proposed legislation will affect your work

It was good to see so many Missouri Press members at the Day at the Capitol activities in late January. Running your newspapers takes a lot of hands-on time and the Association knows that your work requires your constant attention, watching bottom lines while ensuring mistakes don't work their way into stories or ads and that papers are getting to readers in a timely fashion.

But while you are focused on the "small stuff," realizing that, in reality, the "small stuff" is the Big Stuff in the business, our members cannot afford to lose sight of the Really Big Stuff going on in Jefferson City. Mark Maassen, Doug Crews and the folks at Lathrop GPM are there in the Capitol every day, attending hearings, monitoring the status of bills and looking for indications that amendments are about to be attached to a bill that will frustrate the interests of Missouri Press members (and the citizens who read your papers).

That's what I want you to think about today for a few minutes. There are a number of new Sunshine Law cases and I had thought about talking about those new rulings, but to be honest, none of them are as significant as it would be to you if the legislature decides this session to pass any of a number of Sunshine Law bills that have been filed and are beginning the process to become law.

Missouri Press has not specifically offered a bill related to the Sunshine Law for consideration this session, but that doesn't mean there aren't a lot out there. For example, Senate Bill 613 was just heard in late February before the Government Reform committee. That bill imposes a minimum \$5 fee for ANY record request (no more 10 cent copies!) and would undo the provisions passed in Clean Missouri that make records in the offices of state legislators subject to the Sunshine Law.

Senate Bill 828 proposes to close "individually identifiable customer

usage and billing records" of city-owned utility customers, both commercial and residential). (There is a similar bill, House Bill 953, pending in that chamber on this subject.)

House Bill 1366 would close "evacuation and lockdown procedures" for government buildings. (Does that mean there won't be evacuation information posted for use by persons in the building in case of emergencies?) House Bill 1465 would add banks with a financial security interest in your property to the special group allowed to access closed records of law enforcement after an incident under investigation (no doubt a proposal from the banking industry).

House Bill 1563 would make a closed record of the names of all persons who win the state lottery. There have been situations in the past in other states where the public disclosure of winners' names resulted in the discovery of fraud within the lottery system relating to winners being selected.

Then, there's House Bill 1656, which would provide for the waiving of fees for any member of the general assembly making a Sunshine Law request. House Bill 1839 would create a method to seal criminal records of folks who have been clean for 10 years, for certain crimes that have a maximum penalty of not more than five years.

House Bill 2069 would close (in addition to cell phone and Social Security numbers) home addresses of "any individual." In ANY record. (I should note that there is already a

state law closing all Social Security numbers in state offices, so that part of this proposal is already in place.) And House Bill 2477 would close law enforcement testing report records which are in the hands of the state Department of Health and Senior Services.

I'm sure there are some new ones I've missed. The purpose of this recitation is NOT to urge you to phone your legislator and go on the record as opposing these bills. But it is to remind you that Sunshine Week is fast approaching. It's

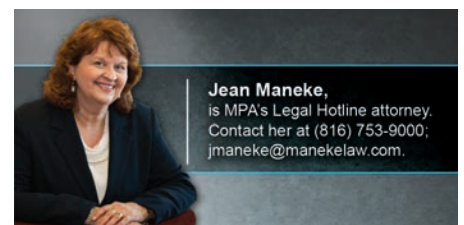
March 15-21 this year. Check out the website at <http://sunshineweek.org/>. What are YOU doing to support public access to records and meetings?

When was your last editorial on the subject? Have you ever done a survey of local public bodies to see their response to records requests? Are meetings being properly posted? Are minutes being properly made available to the public (remember that they need not be approved before they are deemed "public records")?

Tell your citizens and your local legislators how important this law is for the voters. Demand that they support transparency in government and urge your readers to do the same.

Your voices make such a difference in this battle in Missouri! Thanks for what you do to support Sunshine in our state!

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