

Annual Report Summary for 2015

Washington Coalition for Open Government is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to protecting and expanding the public's right to know what their government is doing. Founded in 2002 by activists concerned by the erosion of access to public records and meetings due to legislative acts and court decisions, the Coalition has grown to be the foremost advocate for government transparency in Washington state, including hundreds of citizen activists, government officials, and representatives of business, media, law, labor, environmental, and public policy organizations. Our activities continued at a brisk pace over the past year.

Education

- Our annual **Statewide Open Government Conference** in June featured a keynote by John Paff of the New Jersey Foundation for Open Government, 2014 inductee into state open government hall of fame, and panel discussions on law enforcement body cams, use of private devices by public officials, and use of the PRA by student journalists.
- Focused our **public forum** efforts on topics and areas of local interest where we are invited to come to an area, such as the forum in Puyallup on public records on private devices.
- Answered *many* **requests for assistance** through our email and telephone help lines.
- **Appearances** on many television and radio programs, podcasts, quotations in newspaper articles, and presentations at conferences of other organizations.
- Increased **outreach to college journalism students** and others.
- **Migrated to a new web site platform** with many usability improvements and support for mobile devices.
- Continued expansion of **social media** activities.

Litigation

- Submitted many **amicus briefs** on diverse topics including access to public records stored on private devices and accounts, access to public cable TV network contracts with local broadcast stations, adequacy of explanation of claimed exemptions, methods of calculating PRA penalties, claiming attorney-client or work product privilege to conceal evidence of adequacy of records searches, when the one-year PRA statute of limitations clock starts on partial responses, and access to voted ballots after election.

Legislation

- **WCOG Legislative Priorities** for 2015 included opposing further weakening of the PRA, eliminating executive privilege under the PRA, requiring committee meetings to be open to the public when committees are created by a governing body and delegated any "action" as defined in the OPMA, and requiring an opportunity for public comment before final action.
- Participated in **legislative hearings and advocacy** on many issues including police body cams, the cost of handling large and complex requests, applicability of PRA and OPMA to organizations who receive dedicated tax revenue or large unrestricted grants, access to vessel registration information, and many more.
- **Legislative successes** included avoiding bad body cam legislation, funding for TVW equipment upgrades, permanent funding for a full-time Open Government Ombudsman, and a trial of remote testimony for legislative hearings.
- WCOG is concerned that the **Sunshine Committee** has been co-opted by agencies as a place to introduce new and expanded exemptions.

Recognition

- WCOG's newest award, the **Kenneth F. Bunting Award**, presented to Lewis Kamb, James Neff, and others at The Seattle Times.
- **James Madison Award** presented to The News Tribune.
- **James Andersen Award** presented to George Erb.
- **Ballard-Thompson Award** presented to Senator Joe Fain for his work on mandatory training bill.
- **Key Awards** presented to KOMO TV, Port Angeles City Manager David Timmons, Arthur West, Seattle Police Department COO Mike Wagers, Editor of The Vidette Steven Friederich, Bob Fortner, Althea Paulson, Gene Pollard, Steve Merrival, and Tim Clemans.
- **Scholarship Essay Contest** won by Justina Chen, Interlake High School, Bellevue

Other

- **Patience Rogge**, long time WCOG board member and Events committee chair, passed away this summer from a sudden illness; we miss her very much.
- WCOG lost substantial **funding** through NFOIC; we need more local members and sponsors.
- **Submitted ethics complaint** against Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney for misuse of public funds and conflict of interest