

Bill Adding Teeth to Iowa's Open-Records Law Gets New Life

Written by Lynn Campbell
Thursday, 23 February 2012 10:36

- [69.95\\$ Roxio Toast 11 Titanium MAC cheap oem](#)
- [Discount - Rosetta Stone - Learn Russian \(Level 1, 2 & 3 Set\) MAC](#)
- [Buy Lynda.com - Best Practices for Flash-based Banner Ads \(en\)](#)
- [Discount - Autodesk Alias Surface 2011](#)
- [Buy OEM ABest MPEG VCD DVD Video Converter](#)
- [Discount - Stellar Phoenix iPod Recovery v2 MAC](#)
- [Download Autodesk Maya 2013 \(64-bit\)](#)
- [Buy Infinite Skills - Learning Adobe Audition CC MAC \(en\)](#)
- [Buy Cheap Autodesk Maya 2012 \(64-bit\)](#)
- [Buy OEM Infinite Skills - Introduction To AJAX With jQuery MAC](#)
- [Buy Cheap Adobe Photoshop Elements 9 MAC](#)
- [Discount - Adobe ColdFusion Builder 2](#)

A six-year battle in the legislature to create an Iowa Public Information Board has renewed life because of a new floor manager for the bill with a “strong desire” to move it forward.

“I think the time’s come for this bill to move forward. Six years is long enough,” state Representative Walt Rogers (R-Cedar Falls) said February 22. “Iowans that I’ve talked to talk about transparency in their government. ... I think the common, everyday Iowan needs one place to go to find out some of their answers.”

The board would add teeth to the state’s open-records law.

Under [Senate File 430](#) , the state would create a seven-member board that would address people’s questions and problems about access to government records and meetings, and seek enforcement of the state’s open-records and public-meetings laws.

A member of a governmental body who violates the law could face civil penalties of between \$1,000 and \$2,500.

James Strohman, a former member of the three-member Story County Board of Supervisors, urged lawmakers to approve the bill.

Bill Adding Teeth to Iowa's Open-Records Law Gets New Life

Written by Lynn Campbell

Thursday, 23 February 2012 10:36

Strohman talked about the frustration and difficulty he had as an elected official, serving on a board he believed “deliberately violated open-meetings laws continuously.”

After being elected in 2006, Strohman said, he ran into “a little dictatorship” in which the two other supervisors essentially made all the decisions for Story County’s \$44-million budget, 20 departments, and 350 employees.

“We had a public meeting every Tuesday at 9:30 a.m., but my view was all the decisions were rubber stamps of things that were decided literally in a back room by the other two people who would continually, every day, meet and decide everything – tax levy rates, budgets, appropriations, purchases, employee salaries, and compensation,” Strohman said.

Strohman said he tried to teach the two supervisors about open records and public meetings, and even brought in the executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which advocates for open government, for a presentation.

“At the end of the presentation, one of the board members said, ‘If we did all these things you said we should do, we couldn’t conduct business,’” Strohman said. “There needs to be a mechanism for people to take things to a body and have them investigate something in an impartial way.”

But Larry Pope, a lobbyist for Iowa League of Cities (which represents the state’s 947 cities) and the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities (which represents more than 550 municipal electric, gas, water, and telecommunication utilities statewide), argued that the legislation would increase the size of government.

While an amendment to the bill calls for hiring only one staff member for the new Iowa Public Information Board, Pope said the entity soon would need more resources. He said he couldn’t imagine one person driving around the state, investigating open-records issues alone.

Bill Adding Teeth to Iowa's Open-Records Law Gets New Life

Written by Lynn Campbell

Thursday, 23 February 2012 10:36

"First thing that [a full-time employee] is going to want is staff, a desk. The bill provides that they want access to their own lawyers," Pope said. "I see down the road a substantial state agency being created. I find it interesting in these tough times that you have a legislature that is seriously considering creating a new bureaucracy and a new state agency."

Pope argued that a new law and state board are not needed. He called the legislation "clumsy" and said it would be "prohibitively expensive" and would affect Iowans' willingness to serve in public office.

"This is going to be a very involved process," Pope said. "This is not just a question of somebody calling up and asking for advice and getting it. This could end up in the courts."

Governor Terry Branstad supports the bill. His office has proposed the amendment that would make the Iowa Public Information Board an independent agency in the governor's office, and would reduce the number of new staff members from two to one.

"There currently does not exist an authoritative, single source where people from the public, from the local governments, from the regents and media can go and get answers to questions about what is open, what is not," said Bill Monroe, Branstad's special adviser for government transparency. "We would like to see local and state government entities have the ability to receive timely advice on these questions."

Monroe said the bill enables people to ask for help without having to file a lawsuit or hire a lawyer, as they do now. He said the new board would identify troublesome issues, and create an authoritative source for training on open records and public meetings. He said paring back the new board from two employees to one should help to address concerns about cost.

"It's always eluded me as to why people who are opposed to this would not want an agency that costs them [almost] nothing, provides them timely legal advice, eliminates potential litigation, [and] enables them to adhere to the law," said Monroe, who for 29 years was executive director of the Iowa Newspaper Association. "This is a good-government bill."

Bill Adding Teeth to Iowa's Open-Records Law Gets New Life

Written by Lynn Campbell

Thursday, 23 February 2012 10:36

Neighboring Illinois has a public-access counselor who works for the state attorney general and helps “people obtain public documents and access public meetings,” according to the attorney general’s Web site.

The Iowa Senate approved the bill 49-0 last year, but the Iowa House never debated it. State Representative Kevin Koester (R-Ankeny), a school administrator who was the bill’s Iowa House floor manager last year, said cost was the main sticking point.

Iowa House leaders this year put Rogers in charge of the bill to give it a fresh look. Rogers said his growing passion for the bill stems from Iowans wanting to know more about their government and needing a place to go for answers.

“Overall, how can you disagree with transparency for government, so that Iowans can know more about what’s happening?” Rogers said. “I’m certainly going to push for it. The more I get into it, the more passionate I get about it.”

This article was produced by IowaPolitics.com. For more stories on Iowa politics, visit RCReader.com/y/iapolitics