

2014 SESSION: ATTORNEY GENERAL REQUEST LEGISLATION

OPEN GOVERNMENT TRAININGS



Office of the
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OBJECTIVE

Require open government training for public officials to improve government transparency and reduce lawsuits.

PROBLEM

Open government is vital to a free and informed society, and Washington State has strong transparency laws. Currently, there is no formal requirement for training in the Public Records Act or the Open Public Meetings Act for public officials. Many agencies and entities already provide training, but more consistent training is needed.

In 2012, the State Auditor found over 250 “open government-related issues” among local governments. While many of these issues were relatively minor, others were more significant, such as:

- Providing inadequate notice for special meetings and executive sessions;
- Failing to consistently record minutes; and
- Reaching informal agreement on an official matter via email, rather than in an open meeting.

Failing to comply with state open government laws can result in costly lawsuits and a loss of public trust. For example, on June 27, 2013, one local jurisdiction was fined more than \$500,000 for failing to comply with the Public Records Act.

LEGISLATION (SB 5964 / HB 2121)

This legislation:

- Requires state and local elected and appointed officials subject to the Public Records Act to complete training on the Public Records Act, Open Public Meetings Act, and records management laws; and
- Requires state and local public records officers and records management officers to complete training on the Public Records Act and records management laws.

Training must be completed within specified periods and be renewed every four years. The legislation also provides that the Attorney General’s Office may provide information, technical assistance, and training on the Public Records Act, mirroring the discretionary authority that exists in the Open Public Meetings Act.¹

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SUPPORT

ORGANIZATIONS

- Association of Washington Cities
- The Olympian
- The Spokesman-Review
- Allied Daily Newspapers
- Newspaper Publishers’ Association
- The Secretary of State’s Office
- The Washington Coalition for Open Government and
- The Office of the Attorney General

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1. RCW 42.30.210