



Celebrating Sunshine Week March 10 – 16, 2024

The [Office of the Public Records Advocate](#) (“the Office”) is celebrating Sunshine Week this year by reminding all Oregonians that the Office is here to assist with disputed public records requests, records policy development, and trainings on the requirements and best practices under [Oregon’s public records law](#). “The office exists to serve anyone – whether they are records requesters or custodians – to better understand and successfully use what can often be a confusing and ambiguous system of records disclosure,” said [Todd Albert](#), the Public Records Advocate.

Now nearly 20 years old, Sunshine Week is a national acknowledgment of the importance of public records access and open government. It is also a time to reflect on what’s working and what still needs to be done to ensure that records requesters and custodians alike are supported in their effort to obtain or maintain the public’s records. For instance, to improve knowledge of public records requests at the local level, the Office continues to expand its [District Attorney Public Records Orders Database](#), which contains public records appellate orders regarding disputed requests to local governments. With orders from about half of the counties in Oregon to be published in the database, “we are encouraging all 36 District Attorneys in Oregon to provide their orders so that they may be available to anyone who would like to understand the state of public records at the county level and below,” said Albert. “Increasing overall knowledge of the law makes for better informed requesters and an easier public records process overall, since existing orders can help everyone understand what types of frequently requested (and appealed) records may be provided, and those that are subject to withholding.”

There is still much that needs to be done to improve records disclosure in Oregon. As recently [reported](#) by the Associated Press, [Oregon](#) is just one of many states that have a patchwork system of enforcement, which leaves the court system as the ultimate arbiter of public records disputes. This often requires requesters to inquire costly and time-consuming efforts to see records disclosed or requires public bodies to sue requesters to withhold records they believe to be confidential. “An adversarial system destroys the ability of requesters and records custodians to establish dialogue about requested records, and to work together in trust and understanding when determining the appropriateness of records disclosure and the imposition of fees,” Albert said. “It’s time we addressed basic barriers to disclosure, by establishing a common language amongst requesters and custodians on things like the basic composition of fees, posting of records policies, and the elements that must be considered when contemplating fee reductions and waivers.”