



Enhanced Sunshine Law Enforcement A Good Idea

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Show-Me Institute readers probably know about some of the difficulties we've had in getting municipal spending information for our [Municipal Checkbook Project](#) . From cities' bad record-keeping to being told it would cost us tens of thousands of dollars for them to provide the information, we have heard a lot of excuses for why Missouri municipalities can't tell us how they're spending the public's money. And while some of these answers were arguably in compliance with the letter of Missouri's Sunshine laws, many of the excuses are, in my estimation, far afield from the laws' intent of fostering meaningfully open and transparent government.

But those excuses may have to get more creative if one proposal becomes law. Among other things, the reform would create a "transparency division" in the attorney general's office to focus on transparency matters. It would also put some teeth into the statutes to ensure that agents of the state are in compliance with Missouri's Sunshine laws. While the legislation itself was only recently filed, the idea has been percolating [for at least a few weeks](#).

Creation of a transparency division, Hawley said, will ensure that questions about conflict of interest won't interfere with enforcement of the Sunshine Law. And enumerating penalties for violation of record retention law will help ensure enforcement.

Hawley said many improvements could be made to the Sunshine Law to get it in line with

modern technology. But discussion of a large-scale review of the law shouldn't stand in the way of his proposals aimed at improving enforcement of the existing law, he said.

Comprehensive reform is always welcome. For example, we'd like to see cities regularly report their spending rather than forcing taxpayers to instead chase cities and their excuses ad infinitum. But incremental reforms that move toward those larger ends are also welcome, and it seems like this proposal is well within that track.

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