

Doings
Letter to the Editor

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Transparency and Informed Citizen Participation
Is the Cornerstone of Democracy

Editor Pamela Lannom's comments about the Open Meetings Act were excellent. Unfortunately, most people are not aware of this very important law that mandates public bodies must conduct public business in the public eye, subject to narrow exceptions. In order for citizens to participate effectively in the democratic process, it is essential for individuals and community groups to become adequately informed about issues considered by public bodies. The Open Meetings Act is an important tool to that end.

On a regular basis the Center receives calls from concerned citizens and public officials throughout Chicagoland with Open Meetings Act questions. Conversations beyond the scope of an exemption to close a meeting, closing meetings under the "litigation" exemption when in fact none is imminent or likely to occur, citizens denied the right to make a public comment, public body advisory committee meetings behind closed doors and items considered and voted on without public notice are common problems relayed to the Center. Some public officials may not be aware of the full extent of the Act, leading to violations. Some public officials are aware of the confines of the Open Meetings Act, but ignore it because penalties for violation do not wield a large enough hammer for deterrence.

Every citizen and public official should have a primer on the Open Meetings Act, and educating the public about the Open Meetings Act is a mainstay at the Citizen Advocacy Center. Free copies and easy to understand guides are available at the Center and on our website. The Center also holds free Democracy Workshops explaining the Open Meetings Act and other important tools for democracy. The next workshop is May 7th and anyone interested can call the Center at (630) 833-4080 to attend.