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Letter: Don't roll back FOIA reform

In response to Chris Wetterich's March 16 story, "Vast majority of FOIA requests coming from the public," the Illinois Freedom of Information Act is an extremely important tool for the people in Illinois who participate in our democracy through monitoring the activities of their local governments, an indispensable check on our government officials.

The attorney general's statistics reflecting the public access counselor's caseload mirror the Citizen Advocacy Center's experience with assisting members of the public who request records in order to inform themselves of community affairs that affect them, their families and their neighbors.

We routinely assist people who are denied records, where the public body fails to satisfactorily explain why the exception taken applies to the requested records, and which ultimately result in a letter from the public access counselor's office stating that the requested records should be made public.

Members of the public should be wary of legislative efforts to roll back the FOIA reform enacted in 2010. Since the bill's passage in 2009, each legislative session has seen several backlash bills aimed at curbing the people's access to documents that should be made public, and which are routinely made public in states that have stronger FOIA laws.

It's everybody's job to stay vigilant so that our FOIA statute remains one of the strongest in the nation.

— *Maryam Judar, community lawyer, Citizen Advocacy Center, Elmhurst*