

## **Examples of Public Entities Exploiting Weak Open Government Laws**

The Daily Herald's October 7<sup>th</sup> article regarding Cook County's refusal to release an approved government budget that was unequivocally a public document is a quintessential example of why the public often views government with skepticism and mistrust.

The Illinois Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act are supposed to ensure liberal access to government documents and government decision making. Both laws have outstanding public policy statements regarding government transparency and accessibility, however, the nuts and bolts of the laws that outline how government is supposed to be transparent and accessible are notoriously weak and impose virtually no accountability over those public bodies that are non-compliant.

Be it public bodies that implement false deadlines to file appeals for access to government records (Village of Oak Brook), take three months to respond to a request for information (Addison Township), charge \$2 per page of government records (DuPage County Election Commission), view school district Superintendent's contracts as 'private information' (District 200), or infringe on the public's First Amendment rights by banning individuals from making "disrespectful, insulting, satirical, or offensive comments directed at individual public officials during the public comment portion of board meetings" (Village of Deer Park), the public is at a distinct disadvantage in participating in the democratic process when access to government information, government meetings, and one's First Amendment rights are not protected in a meaningful way. Strengthening our open government laws to coincide with policy statements would go a long way to restoring the public's perception of government honesty and trustworthiness.