

# SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller – June 2007

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## Lights! Cameras! Action! Public Access to Open Meetings

**Did you know that any member of the public has the right to take photographs or make tape recordings at any open session of a governmental meeting?**

Public officials are occasionally surprised to learn that members of the public have the right to use cameras or recording devices during the open session of a governmental meeting.

Members of the public, on the other hand, are occasionally surprised to learn that while they have the right to observe and record a meeting, they do not have the right to actively participate.

**Consider the following tips when planning or attending a governmental meeting:**

- When faced with the challenge of managing a well-attended meeting, public officials should **appreciate public attendance** -- that people care enough to come and watch government in action. Public officials are entitled to adopt **reasonable rules of conduct** to assure that the meeting is orderly and is not interrupted by spectators.
- Public officials **must permit the use of cameras or recording devices** – the public has the right to use them, but members of the public should also be respectful; a meeting is serious business, not just a photo opportunity.
- Members of the public who wish to address the government body should **notify public officials in advance**, so time for public comment on agenda items can be scheduled in the meeting at the discretion of the public officials.
- While not required, public officials should consider routinely adding to the agenda a **structured time for public comment**. Allowing reasonable public participation gives Iowans a unique opportunity to connect with their government.

**Working together, public officials and citizens can foster open and effective government meetings. Embrace public access to open meetings and smile for the camera!**

**[This Sunshine Advisory issued originally in December 2001.]**

Citizens who have inquiries or complaints may call the Iowa Citizens' Aide/Ombudsman Office  
Call toll-free at 888-IA-OMBUD (888-426-6283.)



**Iowa Attorney General's Office: Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.**

On the Web: [www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org). Sunshine Advisories are a general resource for government officials and citizens.  
Local officials should obtain legal advice from their legal counsel, such as the city or county attorney.