

SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller – June 2007

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. 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.