

# SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller – March 2007

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## Open Meetings and Public Records: Let the Sun Shine!

“Sunshine Week” is observed in March. It’s a time to focus on Iowa’s sunshine laws – the Open Meetings Law, and the Public Records Law (Iowa Code Chapters 21 and 22.) These are the laws that assure public access to meetings and public records at all levels of government in Iowa.

This month also marks the Attorney General’s 65<sup>th</sup> monthly “Sunshine Advisory” bulletin. The advisories discuss specific aspects of Iowa’s sunshine laws, and they have been issued each month since November 2001. (Find them all at [www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org).)

### Here are a few highlights summarized from advisories issued over the past year:

- Members of the public can sue governmental officials and governmental bodies to enforce Iowa’s Sunshine Laws when they have a good faith basis to believe the law has been violated. If they prevail, the court may award payment of attorney fees to plaintiffs.
- A single member of a governmental body may participate in a meeting electronically, but the governmental body should assure that the member is audible and is accountable to the public for all discussion and votes.
- Public officials may deny access to an entire record only if the entire record is confidential under law. If only some information is confidential under law, public officials should “redact” or black out confidential information and provide access to the rest of the record.
- Governmental bodies may require payment for records in advance, but, if payment in advance is required, the expenses must be estimated for the requester.
- Unless an emergency requires immediate action, only matters included on the tentative agenda may be discussed at a meeting.

**For copies of all 65 Sunshine Advisories, and for other “sunshine” information, visit [www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org) (click on “open government.”)**

Citizens who have inquiries or complaints about public records or open meetings may call the Iowa Citizens’ Aide/Ombudsman Office – 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). (Click on “open government.”)