

Sunshine in Government Initiative



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STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SGI Applauds the Justice Department's New FOIA Guidelines

"On Day One of his administration, President Obama gave federal agencies a clear mandate to disclose more information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and today Attorney General Eric Holder gave specific instructions on how to carry out that mandate," said Rick Blum upon the release of the Justice Department's memorandum to federal departments and agencies on implementing FOIA. "By restoring the presumption that federal agencies should disclose information absent a foreseeable harm or a legal ban, today's memorandum sends a clear message: when in doubt, let it out. The lights are back on."

The Sunshine in Government Initiative (SGI) is a coalition of nine media groups promoting openness and accountability in government. Members of the SGI coalition include: **American Society of Newspaper Editors, Associated Press, Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, National Association of Broadcasters, National Newspaper Association, Newspaper Association of America, Radio-Television News Directors Association, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and Society of Professional Journalists.**

"In particular, restoring the foreseeable harm standard is important so agency employees know they can -- and should -- choose sunshine when they have the choice," Blum said. "Congress has created more than 260 statutory exemptions to add to the 8 broad categorical exemptions written into FOIA, so there's ample reasons agencies can withhold information."

"The Attorney General clearly makes it clear that all employees should give timely responses when their colleagues bring them FOIA requests. Let's hope this translates into shorter waits, smaller backlogs and a more effective FOIA."

Office of Government Information Services -- the FOIA Ombudsman

Beyond the instructions in today's Holder Memorandum, the Sunshine in Government Initiative believes it is important that federal agencies cooperate with the new Office of Government Information Services, created by the OPEN Government Act of 2007 to mediate disputes between requesters and agencies and to recommend improvements to federal FOIA operations. SGI encourages agencies to cooperate when OGIS becomes involved in a FOIA dispute.

The Sunshine in Government Initiative is a coalition of media groups committed to promoting policies that ensure the government is accessible, accountable and open. Public oversight is the ultimate safeguard of democracy. It is the inalienable right of citizens to examine and judge their government; and that right is served when news media act on behalf of the public to gain access to information. More information is online at www.sunshineingovernment.org.