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## **Public Records Advocate Commemorates Sunshine Week in Oregon**

**Salem, OR (March 11, 2019)** – Today the Office of the Public Records Advocate announces its plans to celebrate Sunshine Week 2019. Sunshine Week is a national effort to promote dialog about the importance of open government and freedom of information at all levels of government. This effort was begun in 2005 by the American Society of News Editors, and is now celebrated throughout the country.

On Wednesday, March 13 at 1PM, the Judiciary Committee of the Oregon House of Representatives will hear testimony on three public records bills. Two of these bills were proposed by the Public Records Advisory Council, which is chaired by the Public Records Advocate, Ginger McCall. The Council, which includes representatives from government, the public, and the media, is tasked with gathering information about the function of public records law in the state of Oregon and making proposals to improve transparency. The first bill, HB 2430 will prevent the expiration of the Council in 2021. “The Council is an essential and unique venue for studying, vetting, and proposing public records policies and legislation,” said McCall.

The Council’s second bill, HB 2431 will require state agencies to publicly report basic information on their public records processing. Each agency will report how many requests it receives each year, how long it takes to respond, and how many requests for fee waivers or reductions it has granted or denied. “This data makes agencies accountable for their public records processing and provides valuable information about areas of potential improvement to the Governor, Legislature, Public Records Advisory Council and the public,” McCall said.

The Office of the Public Records Advocate, in conjunction with Governor Kate Brown, will also honor eleven government employees for going above and beyond in responding to public records requests or advancing policies and practices that reduce barriers to accessing public records. The employees - who represent two branches of state government, two state agencies, and two cities - were nominated by public body leaders, members of the public, or members of the press for their exemplary work in public records. They will receive letters of congratulation from Governor Kate Brown.

“Making information more widely available is a hallmark of open and accountable government,” said Governor Brown. “I commend these public employees’ efforts to go above and beyond in service to their fellow Oregonians, whether via proactively providing and publishing records or by digitizing key information to make it more accessible.”

“We commend these public servants on their superior public records service and advocacy for transparency,” said McCall, “We hope that this will provide a model for other public servants to follow.”

The Office of the Public Records Advocate will also host an online gallery of news stories (available Thursday, March 14) that were made possible through public records requests. These stories were submitted by members of the press and the public. “Public records laws ensure that citizens remain informed about government actions,” said McCall, “We hope that this gallery will demonstrate how many important news stories are made possible by public records.”

The Office of the Public Records Advocate intends to make the celebration of Sunshine Week an annual event. “Government transparency is essential to healthy and meaningful democracy,” said McCall, “We hope to use this week to highlight the importance of public records and provide positive models for change and reform.”

For more information on HB 2430 & 2431, see: <https://sos.oregon.gov/public-records/Pages/advisory-council.aspx>

A list of 2019 Public Records honorees and the 2019 Gallery of Public Records News Stories will be available Thursday March 14 on the Public Records Advocate’s website: <https://sos.oregon.gov/public-records/Pages/default.aspx>