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Public Records Advisory Council releases results of first-ever statewide public records survey

Salem, OR (August 8, 2019) – Today Ginger McCall, the Oregon Public Records Advocate, in her role as the Chair of the Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC) announced the results of the first survey to examine the public records policies of public bodies throughout all levels of government in Oregon.

“This data will inform Oregonians about how public bodies are performing on public records request processing,” said McCall. “Previously, there had been an absence of data regarding public records processing in the state.”

The PRAC is an Oregon state public body, created as part of the 2017 legislative changes that updated the Oregon public records law. It is composed of a mix of stakeholders from both government and the public records requester community and is charged with providing oversight and policy reform proposals related to Oregon’s public records law. Thanks to a bill passed during the 2019 legislative session, the PRAC is now a permanent body. For more information on the Council, including membership and past meetings, visit the PRAC’s website: <https://sos.oregon.gov/public-records/Pages/advisory-council.aspx>.

To better understand and perform its duties, the PRAC is responsible for “survey[ing] state agencies and other public body practices and procedures for receiving public records requests, identifying the existence of records responsive to the requests and gathering and disclosing responsive records; (B) determining fee estimates and imposing or waiving fees...; (C) and determining and applying exemptions for required disclosure of public records.” Section 10, Chapter 728, Oregon Laws 2017. To that end, the PRAC drafted a survey to gain information about public records policies and practices across a broad spectrum of public bodies in Oregon.

In all, the survey was sent to eighty one (81) state agencies, ten (10) school districts, eleven (11) special service districts, eleven (11) counties, and twenty (20) cities. The total response rate from all public bodies was over seventy percent.

“We are pleased that so many public bodies responded to our survey. The relatively high first time response rate indicates that most public bodies do take their duties under the public records law seriously,” said McCall. “However, we hope to have an even higher response rate in the future.”

The PRAC had proposed legislation during the 2019 session, HB 2431, that would have mandated data collection and reporting by state agencies regarding their public records processing, but unfortunately, this legislation did not pass. In its absence, the PRAC survey is the only tool for tracking public records performance.

“It is our hope that in the future there will be even more robust data collection on public records requests and that this will be enshrined in the public records law,” said McCall. “This data helps the government and the public understand how agencies are performing on public records request processing, where additional staffing and resources should be directed, and what new reforms should be considered.”

To view the results of the PRAC’s 2019 public records practices and procedure survey, see: <https://sos.oregon.gov/public-records/Pages/advisory-council.aspx>