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The Sunshine Report: Online Transparency news from the Virginia Coalition for Open Government **April 2011**

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Coalition News

Recently on the VCOG Blog

- [Harrasment, Vexatious and FOIA](#)
- [Let's hear it for these pols](#)
- [FOIA is part public relations](#)

Remember: the blog is interactive and we welcome your comments.

Corrections

The March online Sunshine Report contained two errors: (1) the report should have been listed as March, not February; (2) the bill clarifying FOIA's definition of public records should have said that records *not* related to public business are *not* "public records."
I apologize for the errors.

Greetings, Friend of VCOG!

VCOG sponsors FOIA, records-management workshops

The Virginia Coalition for Open Government is hosting two workshops, **April 27 in Roanoke**, aimed at explaining the ins and outs of Virginia's Freedom of Information Act to citizens, reporters and government employees.

Building on the success of its Spring FOIA workshop and Fall records-management seminar, VCOG is partnering with VCOG members *The Roanoke Times*, the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia FOIA Council and the Library of Virginia to present the two sessions in one day.

The **FOIA Basics workshop**, geared toward citizens and reporters, runs from 9:30 to 12:00, and the records-management seminar, titled "**Making Your FOIA Life Easier**" and geared toward government employees, runs from 1:30 to 4:00. Light refreshments (but not lunch) will be available at both sessions.

Panelists include:

- Maria Everett, FOIA Council Director
- Craig Fifer, Alexandria E-government Manager
- Valerie Garner, Roanoke Free Press
- Bill Hackworth, Roanoke City Attorney
- Laurence Hammack, The Roanoke Times
- Carol Lindstrom, Christiansburg citizen activist
- Anita Vannucci, Library of Virginia

VCOG signs on to amicus brief

The Virginia Coalition for Open Government added its name to a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the lawsuit to strike down Virginia FOIA's citizens-only limitation. The brief was [prepared by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#) and submitted to the 4th Circuit with 20 other signers.

Categorically no

The VCOG Board of Directors voted at its March 25 as a matter of policy to oppose any attempt to categorize a public record as exempt at the time of the record's creation.

Stay up to date on access

Sign up for VCOG's [daily listserv on access and First Amendment news](#) from Virginia and across the country. It's free!

For a steady stream of access-related stories and additional commentary and information, join the more than 400 people who are following [VCOG on Twitter](#). The latest six posts are also carried on [our website](#).

AND, you can also follow bits and pieces of interesting access news on VCOG's [Tumblr page](#).

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[Register for one or both sessions](#) with a credit card on our website, or download hard copy registration forms to send in with a check. Both options are available from the above link.

Click here to [listen to VCOG's Public Service Announcement](#) for the seminars.

Sunshine Week 2011

It was like Spring Break, but without the vacation.

March 13-19 was Sunshine Week in Virginia and across the country, so for access geeks like us, it was a fantastically sunny week.



Newspapers, TV and radio stations across the state ran stories generated by records requests and ran op-ed pieces about the importance of the right to know. Some papers [conducted audits](#) of their area governments to see [how they responded](#) to [routine FOIA requests](#).

WWBT-TV in Richmond hosted VCOG's Megan Rhyne to talk on air about FOIA (see above). Afterwards, Rhyne joined Maria Everett and Alan Gernhardt from the FOIA Council and Ginger Stanley from the Virginia Press Association to answer the phones in a special Call-12 segment on public records.

And for the second year in a row, the *Waynesboro News-Virginian* nominated [the eventual 3rd place winner in a nationwide contest saluting FOI Heroes](#). Thomas Scott Cline of Fort Defiance successfully sued the Augusta County Board of Equalization for closed meeting violations.

Thanks to everyone who helped make Sunshine Week 2011 a bright success!

Open government news

The Virginia Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling that imposed \$80,000 in fines against 40 Gloucester residents who spearheaded a failed recall attempt of four county supervisors. Though the ruling was on narrow, procedural grounds, [a plaintiff in the](#)

[case said](#) the ruling had restored her faith in the justice system....In early March, Fairfax Circuit Judge Leslie Alden heard trial testimony in a case brought by a local parent against the school system that says school board members [exchanged so many emails in such a short period of time as to constitute a meeting](#). A ruling is expected any day now....First, six Halifax County School Board members had lunch together prior to a board meeting. They insisted the lunch was purely social, even though the board chair handed out comments on a issue. Then, during a meeting closed for "personnel" reasons, [two members walked out](#) when they realized the "personnel" was them.... Several months after a disgruntled citizen shot up a school board meeting in Florida, the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors was [considering hiring an armed guard](#) for all meetings....Virginia mustered only a C+ in a nationwide grading by the [U.S. Public Interest Research Group](#) on access state spending data online.... *The Virginian-Pilot* ran a story recently on the ["working papers" exemption](#). The story quoted former Del. Chip Woodrum, an ardent FOIA supporter, as saying the exemption was never intended to give officials an excuse to deny requests....A Hopewell citizen is suing the local sheriff whom she says [ignored her FOIA request](#) and may have intentionally deleted emails she was seeking.

Draw and caption the cartoon

The Charlottesville-area television show Politics Matters is sponsoring a cartoon contest designed to "stimulate thoughtful, creative solutions concerning political and social issues or major importance to YOU."

The lead-in for the cartoon is "Two animals are talking...." On the bottom of the cartoon is the quote from one of the animals, "I'm not entirely sure that's what Jefferson had in mind...." The drawing is up to you.

Your entry can be uploaded to [the show's website](#), or mailed to Politics Matter, P.O. Box 366, Ivy, 22945.

[Click here for more information.](#)

The deadline is May 1.

[If you find VCOG's services and resources useful, consider making a donation or becoming a member. Your dues and/or donations go straight toward VCOG's modest operating budget](#)

and are 100% tax deductible

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