

Sun-e Briefs • June 2009

Sun-e Briefs are a service of the Sunshine Center made possible through a grant from the Knight Foundation. This monthly news update will keep you in the open-government loop by bringing you news about access issues from across the state and updates on the Sunshine Center and North Carolina Open Government Coalition. Coming to you from Elon University, home of the Sunshine Center, we think you'll find **Sun-e Briefs** a valuable addition to your inbox. If you would like to contact us to let us know about a story or to remove your name from our list, please write ncopengov@elon.edu.

Coalition & Center News

N.C. Open Government Coalition attends National Freedom of Information Coalition's annual meeting

Dr. Dale Harrison, Asst. Director of the Sunshine Center, attended the national meeting of open government coalitions in June. The conference was attended by more than 20 of the country's active coalitions and a majority reported higher activity in the past year among citizens seeking government information. Panels featured discussions of how to sustain your open government coalition, how to encourage financial transparency in state government, and 10 technologies open governments should be using to better serve their constituencies. The event closed with a discussion of how to integrate open government into high school civics education. A media stream of the event and other multimedia from the event can be accessed at <http://www.nfoic.org/2009-summit-media>.

Sunshine Center presents at the N.C. League of Women Voters annual meeting

The N.C. League of Women Voter's invited the Sunshine Center to present on the importance of partnerships as it relates to reaching the goals and mission of each of the respective organizations. Dr. Connie Book, executive director of the Sunshine Center, told the gathering that the work of the N.C. League in raising awareness of open government issues and the importance of public access to the state's democracy extended the efforts of both organizations. The presentation was part of an overall panel that included representatives from N.C. Voters for Clean Elections and a state environmental group. <http://www.rtpnet.org/lwvnc/>

Access Update

Sunshine bills still making their way through state legislature

Five bills regarding open government, open meetings and public records continue to make their rounds through the North Carolina State legislature. Here is an update on their status:

- **Keep Recordings of Closed Sessions (House Bill 1263):** Requires large counties and municipalities to tape closed sessions. Referred to Committee on Local Government II. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/ncopengov/ClosedSessionTaping.pdf>
- **Open Records Attorneys' Fees (House Bill 724):** Awards attorneys fees to prevailing parties in public records disputes. Referred to the Committee on State Government/State Personnel. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/ncopengov/HB724RecAttyFees.pdf>

- **Open Government/Non-Disclosure Penalties (House Bill 734):** Establishes public records mediation and holds individuals liable in civil proceedings for failure to provide access; awards attorneys fees to successful plaintiffs. Referred to the Committee on Judiciary I. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/ncopengov/HB734RecPenalties.pdf>
- **Increased Transparency of MH/DD/SA Facilities (Senate Bill 799):** Increases disclosure of details about deaths in state facilities and details of facility police and incident reports. Failed to Concur in Committee Substitute. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/ncopengov/NCFacilityTransparency.pdf>
- **Open Government Act (House Bill 1134):** Establishes public records mediation and awards attorneys fees to successful plaintiffs. Re-referred to the Committee on Finance. <http://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/ncopengov/OpenGovtAct09.pdf>

NCPA continues fight against changes to public notices

North Carolina House Republican leader Skip Stam lost a vote in the House Judiciary I Committee to take public notices away from the public. But after the loss, Stam proceeded to move the bill forward for Clayton, N.C., only and won that vote in committee. The bill was approved by the full House in May and is now heading to the Senate for consideration. The North Carolina Press Association said, "We strongly oppose this measure as taking public notices out of even one newspaper where the public will notice means that members of that community (or communities) are denied information that may be vital to them." Tap into NCPA resources on the proposed legislation at:

<http://www.ncpress.com/ebackgroundsite/ebackgroundlegislature/ebackgroundleg09.html#legals>

State Roundup

State media zero in on public officials who attempt to keep e-mail private

Newspapers in North Carolina are setting their sights on e-mail that government employees and public officials are trying to keep private. They are also taking aim at former North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley and his wife, Mary, who formerly worked at North Carolina State University.

Read the Wilmington Star-News staff editorial and news report about private e-mail:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=938422>

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=938387>

Read the Raleigh News & Observer report on a former Easley aide's use of a private e-mail account to discuss finding Mary Easley at job at N.C. State:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=938421>

Read a Greensboro News & Record staff editorial asking North Carolina government to change its culture:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=938420>
