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The Sunshine Report: Online Transparency news from the Virginia Coalition for Open Government **August 2010**

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Coalition News

Recently on the VCOG Blog...

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We're looking for open government heroes

VCOG is seeking nominations for its annual FOI awards in the categories of citizens, press and government. Awards will be given out at our annual conference in October. The deadline has been extended to Aug. 15. Also, ***if you nominated someone prior to July 23, please resubmit your nomination by the deadline date.*** To nominate an open government hero, [click here](#).

VCOG's members: THANKS!

Greetings, Friend of VCOG!

Access in the Courts

It was a busy week in the courts last week for access to government records, and I'm not even talking about the release on Wikileaks of tens of thousands of classified documents related to the war in Afghanistan.

Right here in Virginia, three cases in varying stages of litigation were bright on the access horizon.

At the highest level, a unanimous 3-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that privacy advocate BJ Ostergren could not be punished under a law prohibiting the publication of Social Security numbers legally obtained from public records.

[Read more on the VCOG Blog.](#)

VCOG presents a records management seminar

On busy days, it can sometimes feel like FOIA is taking up all of a government employee's time. FOIA is an important part of that employee's job, of course, but so are other duties, like projects, reports and the like.

Does it sometimes take hours just to find a record that's been requested? Wouldn't it be great if you knew exactly where those records were? Wouldn't it help if you had an easy way to keep up with

VCOG members: THANKS!

We are lucky to have such dedicated and diligent members. A big thank you to those members who have already renewed their memberships for the year. Renewal notices continue to issue each month, and if you've received one already, please take the time to fill it out and send it back. In the meantime, check out this [impressive list of individuals and organizations](#). VCOG is proud to have as members for 2010-2011.

Stay up to date on access

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

multiple FOIA requests?

MAKING YOUR FOIA LIFE EASIER is for all those records managers and other FOIA responders who want to be more efficient in filling FOIA requests.

VCOG will host a 2.5-hour seminar on the topic at the Library of Virginia on Sept. 15. The cost is \$12/person and is open to all records managers and anyone else interested in the way records management and FOIA intersect.

For more information, as well as registration details, [visit our website](#).

VCOG is proud to present this seminar in partnership with the Library of Virginia, the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council and the Virginia Municipal League.

Open government news

The Virginia FOIA Council [issued an opinion in mid-July](#) finding that though FOIA provides exemptions from mandatory disclosure for certain records related to mandatory meetings, the act does not address whether a mayor may demand that at the conclusion of a closed meeting members of a local governing body give to the mayor any documents distributed or notes taken during the closed meeting ... In the heat of the moment, and apparently forgetting that one of the roles of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission is to ferret out secret deals, the commission voted behind closed doors to hire Glen Tittermary to take over as JLARC's director, after the retirement of longtime director Philip Leone. Sen. Charles Colgan eventually called for a public roll-call vote, and FOIA Council (and JLARC) member Del. Morgan Griffith [opposed the closed-door vote](#) ... Chesterfield and Hanover Counties took top honors in their respective categories in the annual [Digital Counties Survey Awards](#), announced by the Center for Digital Government ... An unusual method used to file documents in the Charlottesville Circuit Court Clerk's Office has raised alarm among area lawyers who worry that the practice is [making important information nearly impossible to locate](#) ... "Whenever we have a request on the consent agenda -- rather than make a big deal out of this every week, which I absolutely will not do -- if there are requests for closed sessions to talk about disposition of public property, I will be routinely voting no as a quiet reminder that [I think we can be more transparent with the public](#)," new Roanoke City Councilmember Bill Bestpitch announced shortly after taking office.

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VCOG annual conference-planning is underway

Panel Topics to include:

- FOIA bootcamp
- Lobbying for open government
- Access on college campuses
- more....

Invited and confirmed panelists include:

- Daniel Gilbert, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter from the Bristol Herald Courier
- Larry Hincker, Virginia Tech
- Maria Everett, Virginia FOIA Council
- Ginger Stanley, Virginia Press Association
- Katie Thisdell, former JMU Breeze editor
- Chris Whyte, Vectre Corporation
- more.....

Dinner and After-Dinner Program

Thursday, Oct. 21: Join VCOG board members, access advocates and supporters of open government at the Commonwealth Suites Hotel for dinner and an after-dinner discussion.

VCOG Conference and Annual Meeting

Friday, Oct. 22: Join VCOG at the Virginia State Capitol, where we will hold panels/discussion, recognize winners of our FOI awards for citizens, press and government, and conduct a brief annual meeting to elect officers and at-large board members.

Thanks to our sponsors, including:

The Associated Press
The Virginian Review
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for details on sponsorship, [contact Megan Rhyne](#).

[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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