

J Radske

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**From:** J Radske <jradske@msn.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 6, 2016 8:22 AM  
**To:** DOA Public Records Board Comments  
**Subject:** Society of Professional Journalists statement to Public Records Board  
**Attachments:** Public Records SPJ Document.odt

Attention:  
Public Records Board  
Matt Blessing, Board Chair

January 6, 2016

The Madison professional chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and SPJ's Region 6 representing Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota applaud the Wisconsin Public Records Board for reconsidering the change it has made to the definition of "transitory records." We believe the change was unnecessary. The new language has been used – improperly – by the governor's office to deny records on at least two occasions. Further, the records board's action in August 2015 may have been taken at an illegal meeting, one that was not properly noticed to the public.

We encourage the Public Records Board to return the definition of "transitory records" to the following: "correspondence and other related records of short-term interest which have no documentary or evidentiary value" and to do so in a legal public meeting. We believe the current definition is too broad and allows public officials to remove records they choose to keep from the public.

Wisconsin's Public Records Law has been in place and defended by current Attorney General Brad Schimel, who has said, "Transparency is the cornerstone of democracy." Former Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen wrote, "I cannot overstate the importance of full compliance with the public records law."

The public deserves the opportunity to know what its government is doing: how it spends public tax dollars, how it creates and implements policy, and how it makes decisions that affect the public. Freedom of Information is the opposite of secrecy. It means the doors and files of government are open and available to the public, instead of being closed to all but a select few.

Government transparency is critical to our democratic republic. Our city's namesake and our nation's forefather, James Madison, in August 1822 put it this way: "A popular government without popular information, or means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people

who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter of public interest.

Joe Radske  
Region 6 Director, Society of Professional Journalists

Mark Pitsch  
President, SPJ Madison

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