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### MADIGAN RECOGNIZES SUNSHINE WEEK, DETAILS 2011 REQUESTS TO PUBLIC ACCESS COUNSELOR

**Chicago** — In recognition of Sunshine Week, Attorney General Lisa Madigan today released details of the more than 5,100 matters before her office's Public Access Bureau in 2011. The Public Access Bureau upholds the state's Freedom of Information Act and Open Meetings Act, helping to foster transparency and openness in Illinois government.

"Every year, the Public Access Bureau handles thousands of requests for help in prying open public records and meetings in Illinois. This work to increase transparency and accountability is essential to restoring the people's trust in government," Attorney General Madigan said.

Madigan, lawmakers and other open government advocates revamped the state's open government laws in 2009 to help bring about long overdue transparency and openness in government operations.

Their efforts permanently established a Public Access Bureau within the Attorney General's Office. The public and media can ask the Public Access Bureau to review whether documents being withheld by a public body should in fact be disclosed under FOIA. The Public Access Bureau also reviews whether public bodies have violated the Open Meetings Act. These "requests for review" submitted by the public and the media can lead to either informal or binding decisions by the Public Access Bureau to resolve disputes regarding public access to government documents or meetings.

In 2011, the Public Access Bureau received 5,164 new matters. Last year's numbers once again show that members of the public, rather than media representatives, are the most prolific users of Illinois' sunshine laws. In fact, records show an increase in the number of members of the public who appealed to the Public Access Bureau last year for help in obtaining public records or gaining access to government meetings.

#### **2011 Public Access Bureau Activities:**

- 5,164 total new matters received by the Public Access Bureau:
  - 4,485 of those matters were closed resulting in a closure rate of 87 percent.
- 2,561 requests for PAC review from those who were denied records under FOIA:
  - 2,000 from members of the public,
  - 171 from the media, and
  - 390 from other entities.
- 286 requests for PAC review regarding OMA violations:
  - 229 from members of the public,
  - 12 from the media,
  - 45 from other entities
- 2,317 requests from public bodies for pre-authorization to deny records under a FOIA request. (Note: pre-authorization requests were eliminated on Aug. 26, 2011, by Public Act 97-579.)
- 28,829 people registered with the Attorney General's office for online training about the state's Sunshine Laws.

Sunshine Week was founded by the American Society of News Editors and is recognized annually every March. More information about Illinois' sunshine laws can be found at Attorney General Madigan's [website](#). Anyone seeking assistance from the Public Access Officer can contact its hotline at 1-877-299-FOIA (3642) or send an email to [publicaccess@atg.state.il.us](mailto:publicaccess@atg.state.il.us).

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