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# Closed meetings <sup>241-800</sup> mishandled

City Utilities, MSU  
governors both using  
blanket exceptions.

Some public bodies across Missouri — including Springfield — are wrongly handling the way they retreat into closed meetings.

The method of alerting the public to these types of meetings is spelled out in the state Sunshine Law. Yet, that law is being violated time and again, according to Jean Maneke, an attorney for the Missouri Press Association.

We agree.  
And we hope our local entities — especially City Utilities and the Missouri State University Board of Governors — take

notice.  
Both CU and MSU's board included notices in recent agendas that they would be meeting behind closed doors. But neither entity properly described why.  
Under the law, agendas for

public bodies must state — at least in a general way — the reasons they are planning a closed meeting. Officials do not have to reveal details, but they must specify the exception by name or number from the Sunshine Law, for instance "Litigation" or "Section 610.021 (1)."

Maneke notes that some officials across Missouri wrongly list numerous exceptions in a blanket fashion, meeting after meeting. CU and MSU's board have listed them in a way that they have an option to discuss

## OUR VOICE

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— or not discuss — subjects under any or all of those headings.

In addition to making such meetings difficult for the public and the media to track, the blanket approach reveals an unsettling bent: officials routinely expect to meet secretly.  
City Utilities routinely cre-

ates a meeting agenda with this kind of notice: "Following completion of its agenda, the Board may, if a majority approves, hold a closed meeting to consider matters included within the purview of Section 610.021 (1, 2, 3, 9, 12, 13 or 17), RSMo.

(Supp.)"  
Similarly, a July board of governors agenda said: "Resolution Authorizing Closed Meeting, Pursuant to Sections 610.021(1), (2), (3), (6), (9), (11), (12), (13), (14) and/or (17)..."

To be clear, we're not suggesting malevolence or subterfuge here. More likely, this problem stems from confusion.

Importantly, the state Attorney General's Office, which is currently holding seminars on the Sunshine Law across the state, has publicly agreed with Maneke on this front.

We hope the office's traveling expert speaks out to help correct this practice. We need to get these required notices more in line with reality, and to straighten out this disconcerting cant toward secrecy.