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SUNSHINE

Missouri has what is known as the Sunshine Law. Technically, it is Chapter 610, Revised Statutes of Missouri, and it spells out what state and local records are open to the public.



Maneke

One of the more important aspects of the Sunshine Law is that it is not simply a way for media to get information, it is for all people.

"It is especially for everybody," said Jean Maneke, an attorney who represents the Missouri Press Association.

Maneke said that the open records law applies to children as well as adults.

"There is nothing in the law that identifies that you have to be an adult," Maneke said, although she pointed out that a child cannot file a lawsuit without an adult representing him or her.

Regardless, she said young people need to know that they can have an impact on government, even if they cannot vote yet.

"They'd be surprised how much impact they can have," Maneke said. "But without knowing what's going on, you can't have an impact."

HISTORY

Missouri's Sunshine Law was created in 1973, seven years after the es-

tablishment of the federal government's own version of the Sunshine Law, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

"Missouri was one of the early adopters of a Sunshine Law," Maneke said.

She said it's not a coincidence that the law was passed in 1973.

"1973 is the middle of the Nixon Watergate era with the federal government dealing with issues of secrecy and clandestine behavior," she said. "The states and citizens were very sensitive at that time to the need for open government."

ONLINE RECORDS

A lot has changed since 1973. Today, government e-mails are considered open records. A lot of records, including information about how to contact officials or how to request records, is posted online. Some cities post digital recordings of city meetings on the Internet.

"The Internet has made information more accessible," Drury's Groves said. "It's easier for people to become engaged."

One example Groves pointed to was Case.net, a site in which anyone can look up a civil or criminal case in Missouri and find out what the person was charged with, the time and date of any scheduled hearings or verdicts or sentencing.

Not everything is considered an open record. At the federal level, issues

involving national security can be kept secret.

Some local issues can remain closed, as well. For instance, law enforcement is allowed by the Sunshine Law to withhold certain information about a crime if revealing the information would interfere with an investigation.

To learn more

The Missouri Attorney General's Web site, ago.mo.gov/sunshinelaw, also contains a host of information about the Sunshine Law. The site contains a frequently asked questions (FAQ) section and a quiz.

The Web site for the Missouri Sunshine Coalition is located at missourisunshine.org/news.

Jean Maneke's blog is located at mosunshine.typepad.com

Missouri Case.net

You can find Missouri Case.net at www.courts.mo.gov/casenet.

NEXT WEEK'S NIE PAGE:

The job of a legislator.

