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OUR VIEW Sunshine Law training session should be required

Thursday, Nov. 19 is a day every elected and appointed public official in Cass County should plan to be in Harrisonville.

Public education officer Tom Durkin of Attorney General Chris Koster's office will conduct a free one-hour class pertaining to the Sunshine Law in the Cass County Sheriff's Office training room at the Justice Center, and it should be packed to overflowing.

Missouri's Sunshine Law is the key to transparency in government, to the public's right and responsibility to oversee those it elects to act on its behalf. It, and laws like it, is what keeps our nation and local governments in line with the Constitution and its intent.

Most Sunshine Law violations are not committed with the intent to abuse the public trust – rather they are committed out of expediency and ignorance.

Though there are many elements to the law, and many like to claim that it is simply too complicated to follow expressly, we feel most of those arguments are simply an excuse not to learn.

Earlier this year, the Peculiar Board of Aldermen was caught in an alleged open

meetings violation that most would agree was completely unintentional. However, the city's attorney, who is paid to understand the requirements of the Sunshine Law, showed a clear lack of understanding of the law's intent when questioned later on his reasons for allowing the discussions that should have been held publicly to occur behind closed doors.

Many public bodies end up learning these lessons hard way, and for an intentional violation, the personal penalties can be costly. But more importantly, adherence to the law is a moral obligation any public body has to those it serves.

The public has a right to demand its representatives take advantage of every opportunity to learn more about its obligations to those they represent – and especially opportunities such as this that are free and simple.

We will take careful note of those that attend the Nov. 19 session, and name each individual in attendance.

As voters and constituents, you may decide who is taking seriously their responsibilities in office and whose priorities you might be right to question.

