



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **ARKANSAS TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT GROUP (ArkTIGG.com)**

The Second Annual Freedom Of Information Act Symposium, sponsored by the Arkansas Transparency in Government Group (ArkTIGG.com), has been scheduled for Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at the Durand Center in the Crockett Tower Building on Main Street, north of the town square, in Harrison. The entire Symposium, is free to the general public. Beginning at 9:30 a.m., the Symposium will focus upon key issues related to the State's Freedom of Information Act, a far-reaching statute which was adopted by the Arkansas Legislature in 1967 under the leadership of former Arkansas Governor Winthrop Rockefeller. Designed as a law for the people, and better known as "the people's law", the vital FOIA legislation seeks to make more transparent the operation of many of the aspects of all local and State governmental agencies-and specific nonprofit entities -- throughout Arkansas.

The entire Symposium will be live-streamed at the ArkTIGG web site: [www.ArkTIGG.com](http://www.ArkTIGG.com)

Coinciding with the date of the Symposium is the fact that Wednesday, March 16 will also be celebrated across America as "Freedom of Information Day". Various groups across the Nation will be, on that day, recognizing both federal and state Transparency and Open Record Laws as they impact, upon, and apply to, the lives of all American citizens.

The Arkansas Transparency In Government Group (ArkTIGG.com) is currently comprised of nine local, self-directing Transparency In Government Group chapters located in Bella Vista, Conway, Fort Smith, Gravette, Harrison, Hot Springs, Jonesboro, Ozark and Washington County. Each of the nine respective chapters has dedicated its membership activities to the better understanding of the purposes of the FOIA statute and to the encouragement of Citizen interest and positive utilization of that valuable piece of legislation. As individuals become aware of their local county and State governments, the provisions and mandates of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) can be valuable tools to assist Citizen access to governmental and certain nonprofit documents and their participation in meetings sponsored by those agencies and entities. The Arkansas Transparency in Government Group (ArkTIGG.com) was officially established on January 22, 2020.

According to Arkansas Attorney General, Leslie Rutledge, she has an immense appreciation for former Governor Rockefeller's foresight and leadership, for fifty years ago, endorsing the original idea leading to the adoption of the Arkansas Freedom of Information legislation. Providing clarity to this essential piece of legislative work continues to be the goal of the Attorney General in order that governmental officials, journalists and all Arkansas Citizens

become fully informed about this important statute. Attorney General Rutledge further believes that the intent of this vital ACT is for the State's FOIA undertakings to remain a model for open government which promotes transparency for Citizens as they seek to rightly have access to public information.

Serving as guest speakers during this Second Annual Symposium of the Arkansas Transparency In Government Group (ArkTIGG.com) will be several key individuals whose interests and expertise correlate closely with the intent and purpose of the FOIA legislation.

The moderator for the day-long Symposium will be Joey McCutchen, lead attorney for the McCutchen Sexton Napurano, The Law Firm, headquartered in Fort Smith. Joey is also chapter leader of the Western Arkansas Transparency in Government Group operating out of Fort Smith. He has successfully represented numerous clients who have filed requests for copies of documents and information as per the State's FOIA, and he is passionate about the rights of Citizens to be able to learn about the law and its application to governmental and nonprofit agencies and entities. During the morning session of Symposium, Joey will be speaking on the topic of "Major FOIA Court Decisions".

Several presentations during the Symposium will also focus upon the availability of various Attorney General Opinions as they may relate to any aspect of the State's Freedom of Information Act. The Opinions Section of the AG's office has a data base consisting of thousands of AG Opinions which may be accessed by any Arkansas Citizen for review. Knowledge and awareness of such Opinions continue to be helpful to many individuals as they seek more openness and transparency in various State agencies and entities. During the Symposium several presentations will provide participants with the knowledge, protocol and procedure for accessing various AG Opinions.

During the Symposium, attendees will have the opportunity to hear a brief review of various sections of the Arkansas Freedom of Information HANDBOOK, 19<sup>th</sup> edition. Copies of the 60-page document are free and may be obtained in single or multiple copies from the Office of the Governor, Attorney General, Arkansas Press Association, Arkansas Municipal League, Arkansas Broadcasters Association, The Society of Professional Journalist and/or The Public Relations Society of America, Arkansas Chapter. The HANDBOOK is packed with vital comments, key questions and answers and is a "must have" for any Citizen interested in Freedom of Information issues.

Each Symposium attendee will receive at least one copy of the valuable HANDBOOK plus a pocket-sized copy of the US Constitution!

During the Symposium's morning session, attendees will have the opportunity of learning valuable information from Judge Gunner DeLay, a Division V member of the Sebastian County Circuit Court in Hot Springs. A former member of the Arkansas Legislature and currently a candidate for a position on the Arkansas Supreme Court, Judge DeLay brings a vast amount of judicial knowledge to the Symposium and is a staunch proponent of openness and transparency in government. Attendees will want to hear Judge DeLay express his opinions concerning all aspects of "the people's law".

Joey McCutcheon, "a bulldog attorney" from Fort Smith, will discuss some major court decisions related to freedom of information issues. Known for his passion and knowledge of the

1967 Arkansas statute, Joey brings to the Symposium a vast amount of FOIA legal expertise as he has successfully represented plaintiffs throughout Arkansas, and he currently heads the Western Arkansas Transparency in Government Group in Fort Smith. It would be difficult to find any individual in Arkansas who is more knowledgeable of, passionate about and more willing to lend his FOIA expertise to the public than Attorney Joey McCutchen.

Providing his governmental expertise during the Symposium will also be State Senator Dan Sullivan from Senatorial District 21 in Jonesboro. Senator Sullivan, elected in November of 2020, and assuming his position on January 11, 2021, has been a passionate advocate for the Arkansas Transparency in Government Act. He has served 3 terms as a member of the Arkansas House of Representatives, was a teacher, coach and building administrator in the field of education for 39 years and has had considerable experience working in the critical areas of behavioral health as it relates to children in areas relating to childhood developmental disabilities.

Initially, after lunch, Symposium participants will hear pertinent remarks from Mike Masterson, a long-time journalist, newspaper editor and publisher now living back in Harrison. The nephew of John Paul Hammerschmidt, the loved and well-respected federal congressman who was originally from Harrison. Mike has been the editor of three Arkansas daily newspapers, and he headed the master's journalism program at Ohio State University. Citizens are now regularly treated to his weekly column in the Arkansas Democrat Gazette. Mike is a passionate supporter of the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act.

Entitled "FOIA Today and in the Future", the presentation by Robert Steinbuch will appeal to Citizens desiring to obtain a better understanding of the State's FOIA, its use, ramifications and benefits. Robert is known throughout the State for his knowledge and passion concerning FOIA issues, and he has co-authored the treatise entitled "The Arkansas Freedom of Information Act" which continues to serve as the "the bible" for those desiring to learn more about the FOIA statute. Robert has served for several years as a professor of law at the Bowen School of Law in Little Rock and has been involved as a lead or co-attorney in several court cases where knowledge and application of the Freedom of Information Act statute have been critical. Robert also serves as a member of the State's FOIA Task Force.

Discussing the State Freedom of Information Act Task Force during the Symposium will be Ellen Kreth, owner and publisher of the Madison County Record newspaper in Huntsville. The Task Force, first authorized by the 91<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the 2017 Arkansas Legislature, has been given the responsibility of evaluating all proposals being promoted by various members of the State Legislature which, if adopted, would affect, in some way, the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act. Serving primarily during respective Legislative sessions, members of the Task Force report their collective recommendations concerning any proposal from a Senator or Representative to the full Legislative body. Although the Task Force was given no legal authority, its recommendations to the full Legislature concerning proposed enactments are each given a "do pass", "do not pass" or "recommend revisions" designation. Before assigning such designations, the Task Force invites those Senators and/or Representatives who are sponsoring Legislative proposals to appear before the Task Force for the purpose of defending their respective points of view and answering pertinent questions from Task Force members concerning their proposals.

As a retired educator, Iris Stevens has been involved in the utilization of the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act for several years. As head of the Northeast Arkansas TIGG located in Jonesboro, Iris, during the Symposium, will discuss several questions and answers relating to local public-school districts in Arkansas. Few individuals in the State are as active and passionate concerning the learning and application of the State's "Open Records Law" as is Iris.

Also contributing significantly to the Symposium's coverage of the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act issue will be such speakers as Luke Charlton from Gravette, George Pritchett from Hot Springs, Tanya Charlton from Gravette, Bob Gregory from Conway, Dr. Bill Ray Lewis from Harrison and Colonel Jim Parsons from Bella Vista. All of these individuals are passionate supporters of the State's FOIA, have many years of experience of learning about open records issues and have been actively involved in the dissemination of information concerning the law to other individuals throughout the State of Arkansas.

Any individual attending this Second Annual Freedom of Information Act Symposium sponsored by the Arkansas Transparency in Government Group will obtain a great amount of useful ideas and information concerning this important statute. Each Symposium attendee is encouraged to transfer the information learned during this meeting to other Citizens within the State of Arkansas in order that those individuals, too, will become more aware of, and confident to utilize, the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act.