

***Sunshine Forum news release***  
***Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government***

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## Threats to open government grow in Kansas

Why is it sometimes so difficult for the public to get access to public information? Why are so many local governments around Kansas running afoul of the state's open meetings law?

Those are two key questions for a statewide television broadcast on the Power of Open Government March 12 at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 330 N. Broadway in downtown Wichita. The panel will be carried live on Cox Channels 22 in Wichita and Topeka, as well as KWCH.com and KFTI.com. It will be rebroadcast on KPTS, Channel 8, at 7 p.m. on April 3 and around the state on the Public Broadcast System.

Kansas recently failed an open government test by the Better Government Association, an independent non-partisan government watchdog group based in Chicago. Among other things, the BGA researches solutions that promote transparency and accountability in government.

"The threat today is real," said Randy Brown, executive director of the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government. "We are seeing closed government problems popping up around the state. Some local governments are doing well. But for Kansans who understand that open government at all levels is essential to democracy, things are getting worse, not better."

In recent months, open government violations have been reported or formally charged in Topeka, Lawrence, Thomas County and Chanute.

Panelists include State Sen. Tim Huelskamp of the Dodge City area, Wichita Vice Mayor Sharon Fearey, Kansas Attorney General Stephen Six (invited), Eagle Editor Sherry Chisenhall and broadcast and print journalist Nickie Flynn. Moderators will be Brown and Susan Huxman, director of the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University.

The panel is free and open to the public. A reception will follow at 8 p.m. Audience members, who will be able to ask questions, should be seated by 6:45 p.m.

Sponsors are the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government and the Wichita Metro Chapter of the League of Women Voters.