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WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES 2011 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Washington Coalition for Open Government announced today its priorities for legislative action during the 2011 legislative session, which starts on Monday, January 10. These priorities include:

- Establish model rules or safe-harbor provisions for the level of agency resources to be allocated to handling public records requests, and reasonable procedures for managing the queue of requests;
- Create low-cost alternatives for resolution of Public Records Act (PRA) and Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) disputes;
- Exempt recordings and minutes of executive sessions from disclosure;
- Require training for every elected or appointed official and government employee on basic open government principles and preservation and disclosure of records;
- Expand access to legislative and court administrative records;
- Restore the original intent of the attorney-client communications exemption;
- Improve preservation and access to electronic records;
- Require agencies to scan paper records into electronic form if requested;
- Prevent arbitrators or judges from ordering destruction of public records; and,
- Preserve the Sunshine Committee.

The full text of the WCOG legislative priorities is available on the Coalition web site at http://www.washingtoncog.org/legislative_priorities.php. These priorities are just a portion of the Coalition's full legislative agenda, which may also be viewed on the Coalition's web site.

"The Coalition insists that state and local governments treat accountability to the public, including access to public records and meetings, as an essential function of every agency," said Toby Nixon, president of Washington Coalition for Open Government. "We recognize that resources for handling public record requests are necessarily limited like budgets for every other essential government function, and that's why we're proposing a number of measures that will save money and resources while helping agencies be accountable to the public. By enacting these priorities, the legislature can go a long way toward helping agencies manage their budgets and avoid expensive disputes over access to records and meetings in the future."

These priorities will be delivered by email to all 147 members of the state legislature, the governor, the attorney general, the secretary of state, and the state auditor. Sponsors are being sought for bills to enact each of the recommendations. The Coalition will work with committee chairs to schedule hearings on the bills, provide testimony, and work to improve legislation and build support throughout the legislative process.

“Coalition members will be informed of the progress of bills implementing these legislative priorities, and of all other legislation impacting on open government, in weekly update emails throughout the session,” said Nixon. “We hope our members and other concerned citizens will contact their legislators and urge support for these measures.”

The Washington Coalition for Open Government (WCOG) is an independent non-partisan non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening the state’s open government laws and protecting the public’s access to government at all levels. Members of the Coalition include individual citizen activists and representatives of government, media, law, education, labor, business, and public policy organizations.

For more information, contact Washington Coalition for Open Government, 6351 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664 or on the web at www.washingtoncog.org or call (206) 782-0393.

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