

# Pennsylvania Local Government Conference

4855 Woodland Drive  
Enola, PA 17025-1291  
(717)763-0930  
(717) 763-9732 (FAX)

August 28, 2007

Timothy M. Williams, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Newspaper Association  
3899 North Front Street  
Harrisburg PA 17110

Dear Tim:

I am writing on behalf of all of the captioned local government groups in response to PNA's recent initiatives in creation of an Open Records blog and in staging the "Open Records Challenge." We are profoundly disappointed with the nature and tone of these initiatives, starting with your throw-away lines in the news release accompanying the Challenge that "many Pennsylvanians aren't sure how to file an open records request with their local or state government." and that "Too often, they only find out how difficult the process is when they badly need information, and unfortunately, there's a steep learning curve."

These blatant falsehoods and their negative tone are particularly offensive given the strong cooperative relationship we have all been heading toward in educating the public on records access, and in developing meaningful and balanced amendments to the law. We think the progress on all fronts has been tremendous, yet your missive ignores the plain fact that we fulfill the vast majority of records requests easily, immediately, and completely, and instead persists in portraying records retrieval as some arbitrary and torturous process.

Similarly, we think the blog is well constructed and could be an excellent forum for dialogue and for discovering and rectifying problems with both law and practice, but is subverted by its tone and its utter failure either to acknowledge our success in providing and improving access, or to present any other perspective on the debate.

We also note parenthetically that to stage a contest that will largely result in busy-work for our local governments is a disservice to both taxpayers and our staff.

We have now testified before the General Assembly three times in support of changes in the law, largely consistent with those you espouse, and we have spent hours with your staff and that of the Governor's Office and other interests in developing legislation to meet these ends. We intend to continue in this effort, and would appreciate some balance in how our members' fulfillment of the law, and our activities on the public's behalf, are presented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Hill". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Douglas E. Hill  
Executive Director

cc: Legislative Leadership  
Governor's Policy Office  
Members, House and Senate State Government Committees