

Maclver Institute: Celebrates sunshine week, calls on Gov. Evers to carry on tradition set by Walker

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MADISON — This week, the Maclver Institute and government transparency advocates nationwide observe Sunshine Week, an annual celebration of transparency and accountability. This year, Maclver calls on Gov. Tony Evers to show leadership when it comes to the critical issue of openness.

Sunshine Week recognizes a topic of great importance to all Wisconsin taxpayers. As a past winner of the Citizen Openness Opee Award from the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, Maclver knows how critical the open records law is to forcing transparency on government and giving taxpayers a fighting chance to know what their government is doing with their money.

A tradition of openness was established by Gov. Scott Walker, who in 2016 signed Executive Order #189. The order established new requirements for state agencies relating to open records requests, including more stringent requirements for responding to records requests, as well as a statewide public tracking system so that the public can compare agency responsiveness.

The executive order directed each state agency to fulfill “any small and straightforward request” within 10 business days “whenever it is practicable to do so.” The order required state agencies to acknowledge receipt of any request within one business day, and forced them to respond within five business days when a requester asked for an update on the status of a request.

Previously, response times often lasted weeks or months for a simple request, depending on the agency.

Under the executive order, agencies cannot charge for any records request costing under \$50 to retrieve, nor can they charge per-page for records that also exist in an electronic format. Before that, agencies and local units of government were only required to notify requesters if the cost of retrieving a request exceeds \$50. Some

agencies would charge extra or fees for a simple search of email records. Recognizing Sunshine Week and the importance of government transparency, **Maclver Institute President Brett Healy** issued the following statement:

“Sunshine week is important because it draws attention to government transparency and how important that transparency is for taxpayers if they want to keep an eye their government. The open records law is a critical tool citizens can use to discover what the politicians and the bureaucrats are doing with their money. Many units of government try to block out transparency by charging unnecessarily high fees to give citizens what should be basic and readily available information. Governor Walker’s executive orders promoted transparency by making it clear supplying public information to the public was not a burden for government and bureaucrats.

“I hope Governor Evers will take the opportunity of Sunshine Week to affirm his administration’s commitment to transparency by keeping in place these very important Walker executive orders.

“The people of Wisconsin are looking to Governor Evers to show leadership when it comes to government transparency. We need Governor Evers to continue Wisconsin’s tradition of open and transparent government and provide a positive example for local governments,” Healy said.