

Wisconsin Transparency Project: Launches state's only law firm dedicated to open government

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Attorney Tom Kamenick is proud to announce the launch of the [Wisconsin Transparency Project](#), Wisconsin's only law firm dedicated to enforcing open records and open meetings laws. The Project's mission is to provide no- and low-cost legal representation to people and organizations around the state facing issues with government transparency.

"Wisconsin's open government laws are very strong," said Kamenick, the Project's President and Founder, "but they are woefully underenforced. The Attorney General and District Attorneys frequently receive complaints of violations, but rarely if ever prosecute them. That leaves it up to individuals and organizations to file lawsuits on their own."

[Bill Lueders](#), President of the [Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council](#) and Editor of [The Progressive](#), remarked on the increasing need for open government litigation: "Litigation over open government issues should always be a last resort; but, unfortunately, given the growing culture of contempt for the public's right to know in some quarters, we are seeing more instances in which it has become necessary."

But legal representation is expensive, and most people don't have the resources to spend tens of thousands of dollars seeking records or trying to make governmental bodies hold meetings properly.

"The Wisconsin Transparency Project was formed to solve that problem," explained Kamenick. "We offer free consultations on open government questions, and if a lawsuit is necessary we will represent you on a contingency basis. Open records

and open meetings lawsuits award attorney fees to successful plaintiffs, so I ask very little up front from my clients – just enough to pay the out-of-pocket court costs and cover my first couple hours of work. In some cases we will even waive all expenses.”

Kamenick operates the Wisconsin Transparency Project out of his home in Port Washington. The city’s famous harbor and lighthouse form the inspiration for the Project’s logo, which shows a lighthouse clearing the fog in the state. Photographs of the city also appear throughout the firm’s website, www.wiopenrecords.com.

About Wisconsin’s Transparency Laws

Under Wisconsin’s Open Records Law, any person has the right to view and/or receive a copy of virtually any record held in any government office or by any government official, with minimal and carefully-delineated exceptions. Common Open Records Law violations include:

- Unnecessary delays
- Unlawful fees
- Excessive redactions
- Refusing to provide electronic copies
- Demanding that you identify yourself

“Open government is not a partisan issue,” said Kamenick. “We see violations on the left and the right and everywhere in between. At the Wisconsin Transparency Project, we will represent any person, seeking any record, from any custodian, regardless of political persuasion.”

Under Wisconsin’s Open Meetings Law, every meeting of a “governmental body” must be held in open session and preceded by adequate notice of the meetings’s business. The term “governmental body” covers virtually any committee, board, or council in government. Closed sessions are allowed in only a few specific instances. Common Open Meetings Law violations include:

- Vague agenda items
- Improper closed sessions
- Claims that a body is a “work group” or something else not subject to the law

[Christa Westerberg](#), Partner at the Madison-based law firm [Pines Bach](#) and open

government expert, had this to say about the Project: “Many government officials do a good job of complying with Wisconsin’s transparency laws, but we must have robust enforcement options when they don’t. The Wisconsin Transparency Project is a welcome addition to the community of practitioners doing this work.”

About Tom Kamenick

Prior to founding the Wisconsin Transparency Project, Tom Kamenick was Deputy Counsel and Litigation Manager at the [Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty](#), a non-profit law firm and think tank dedicated to the rule of law, individual liberty, constitutional government, and a robust civil society. At WILL, Tom litigated [many open government cases](#), including victories at the [Wisconsin Supreme Court](#) and [Court of Appeals](#).

Former colleagues at WILL had high praise for Tom.

[Anthony LoCoco](#), Deputy Counsel at WILL: “Tom Kamenick has long been one of Wisconsin’s most ardent advocates of governmental transparency. We will all be able to rest a little easier knowing that the Wisconsin Transparency Project is fighting to ensure that government records and meetings remain open to the public.”

[Rick Esenberg](#), President, Founder, and General Counsel at WILL: “Tom was a part of WILL since its inception and was a vital part of our successful litigation team. He’s a talented lawyer and I expect he will thrive in his new pursuits. I’m sure we will be working together in the future.”

Tom has been heavily involved with open government for years. He is a public member of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council and represented that organization at the [National Freedom of Information Coalition’s](#) annual convention in 2018. That year he also [testified](#) to the Wisconsin Legislature about the importance of access to government records. In 2017 he was a panelist for a Milwaukee Press Club [event](#) on open records and meetings, and in 2016 he traveled to eight locations around the state as a panelist on the Wisconsin FOIC’s [Open Government Travelling Show](#). His writings have been published in the [Wisconsin Law Journal](#), the [Federalist Society Docket Watch](#), and [Wisconsin Lawyer](#).

Bill Lueders also praised Tom’s role as an open government advocate: “Tom Kamenick is a good lawyer and a true friend of open government. He has already

played a key role in a number of cases, and his new project promises to deliver major benefits to the state. Protecting access to meetings and records is fundamental to our democracy.”

Tom holds a J.D., *magna cum laude*, from Marquette Law School and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music Education with high honors from UW-Milwaukee. Prior to joining WILL at its founding 2011, he spent a year as a law clerk for former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman, worked as a Tax Consultant at Reinhart Boerner van Deuren, and served as research assistant to the Dean of Marquette Law School, Joseph Kearney. He also is an adjunct faculty member at Wisconsin Lutheran College, teaching undergraduate business law.

Tom lives in Port Washington with his beautiful wife, two children, and irish wolfhound. He enjoys putting his undergraduate degree to use singing in his church choir and performing with local community theater groups, most recently as Donkey in [Lakeshore Production's](#) 2019 summer show, Shrek the Musical.