

Wisconsin Transparency Project: Three clients win prestigious “OPEE” awards

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The Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council has announced this year’s “OPEE” winners, and three clients of the Wisconsin Transparency Project are among those honored.

The awards recognize outstanding efforts to protect Wisconsin’s long tradition of open government and highlight some of the threats to it. They are being announced in advance of the American Society of News Editors’ national [Sunshine Week](#), March 14-20. This is the 15th consecutive year that OPEES have been awarded.

The state’s largest newspaper, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, was honored in two separate categories this year, winning both the Media Openness Award and Open Records Scoop of the Year Award. The Wisconsin Transparency Project represents the Journal Sentinel in two separate lawsuits: one [seeking to obtain records](#) about former Representative Staush Gruszynski’s sexual harassment of a staffer and the other [seeking to obtain records](#) from the state about COVID outbreaks at large businesses.

Municipal Judge Peter Tharp, of the Village of Roberts, was awarded the Whistleblower of the Year Award. Represented by the Project, Tharp sued the Village over its failure to respond to more than 80 record requests made over a three-year period. In October, the village [agreed to settle](#), providing more than 1,500 records and paying \$7,500 in fees, costs and damages. Tharp also had his attorney, Tom Kamenick, draft a complaint identifying deficiencies in the village’s Open Meetings practices, and send a [letter](#) urging improvement, which Kamenick says it has pledged to do.

Finally, in a bit of irony for transparency advocates, an anonymous individual won the Citizen Openness Award. The Open Records Law guarantees that people can make record requests anonymously, and when the Madison Metropolitan School District refused to fulfill such a request, this person [sued](#) to protect their right to remain anonymous and won.

“The Transparency Project is making a huge difference around the state,” said President and Founder Tom Kamenick. “In the last year and half, it has filed or become involved with 17 cases, written 36 letters demanding the release of records or improvements in policies, and provided advice to hundreds of people.”