



## MEA Announces Legal Action to Force Disclosure of Public Records Related to Natural Resources Board Member's Refusal to Step Down

### Complaint Filed after Frederick Prehn Appears to Improperly Withhold Text Messages

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**Contact:** Peg Sheaffer, MEA Communications Director  
(608) 251-5047 x 3, [psheaffer@midwestadvocates.org](mailto:psheaffer@midwestadvocates.org)

**Madison, WI**—Today, Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA) filed a legal action in Dane County Circuit Court asking the Court to enforce Wisconsin's Public Records Law by compelling Dr. Frederick Prehn to turn over text messages, emails, and all other communications related to his refusal to step down from the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB) after the expiration of his term.

On June 29th, MEA filed a public records request seeking all communications sent or received by Prehn regarding his tenure on the NRB. In response to MEA's public records request, Prehn turned over emails revealing that he had communicated with staff of Republican legislators and lobbyists for special interest groups—including Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce—about staying on after the expiration of his term.

[The complaint](#) filed today in Dane County Circuit Court stems from the discovery that, in addition to communicating by email, Prehn also communicated about his tenure on the board by text. Through a separate public records request to another public official, MEA obtained a text message sent by Prehn in which Prehn discussed his decision to remain on the NRB. The complaint alleges Prehn violated the Public Records Law by improperly withholding this and other relevant text messages in his response to MEA's June 29<sup>th</sup> request.

Wisconsin's Public Records Law entitles the public to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government. The law promotes democracy by ensuring that state, regional, and local governments conduct their business with transparency.

"This legal action is about holding Dr. Prehn accountable to the law, just like any other government official," said **MEA Staff Attorney Rob Lee**. "Text messages related to government business are public records that officials have a duty to preserve and provide access to. The people of Wisconsin deserve a government that conducts its business lawfully and with transparency."

"Frederick Prehn's emails clearly show that he has been communicating with lobbyists in Madison about his refusal to step down, said **David Clausen, former chairperson of the NRB**. "By withholding the full extent of his communications, he continues to do great damage to Wisconsin's tradition of limiting the influence of politics in natural resources and conservation decision making."

“Over the coming months, the Natural Resources Board will be setting policy on a wide range of issues, including wildlife management, PFAS water quality standards, nitrate contamination in drinking water, and land acquisition, among many others,” said **Elizabeth Ward, Sierra Club – Wisconsin Chapter**. “These important issues must be acted upon by an NRB that is comprised of members who are acting transparently and in the best interest of the people of Wisconsin.”

*Midwest Environmental Advocates is a nonprofit law center that combines the power of law with the resolve of communities facing environmental injustice to secure and protect the rights of all people to healthy water, land, and air. Learn more at [www.midwestadvocates.org](http://www.midwestadvocates.org) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates](https://www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates)*

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