



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204-2797

FRANK O'BANNON
GOVERNOR

To: All Agency Heads
From: Governor O'Bannon
Date: April 27, 1998
Subject: Access to Public Records

I want to thank each of you for your hard work and your dedication to public service. The people of Indiana are fortunate to have you here.

I believe, as I know you do, that for our system of government to work as it should, the people must be able to find out what their government is doing. The first section of our State Constitution says it simply and clearly—that "all power is inherent in the people." Too many already think that government doesn't care about people like them, so they stop voting or otherwise participating in civic life. When someone does make the effort to find out what government is doing, it should be a basic part of our mission to provide that information.

I recognize that this is easier said than done. Some important sections of the public records statute are not as clear as they might be. There are a lot of close calls. And I believe you have done an excellent job in complying with the spirit and the letter of the law. I simply want to reinforce the idea that this administration has been, and will continue to be, an open administration.

An open government is essential to a free society. As a new legislator in 1971, my first bills helped preserve local government records. I was the Senate sponsor of the Access to Public Records Act and supported the Open Door Law. As a newspaper publisher, I also understand how important this is to the media. We are now considering several initiatives on how best to improve public access. You will receive further information about these issues in the near future.

It may be tempting for some to treat public records requests as a nuisance and a distraction from their "real" work. But it is a fundamental part of our real work. Here is how James Madison put it: "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce, or a tragedy; or, perhaps both."

Thank you again for your outstanding service to the public.