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## Editorial | Our View

# Kill bills that push secrecy

By [Star-Advertiser staff](#)

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Perennial attempts to weaken state laws that promote open meetings and good government in Hawaii require constant vigilance to deter. Although it appears that some attempts have stalled this legislative session, several bills still require careful watching.

Senate Bill 1210, which would have relaxed the Sunshine Law requiring open meetings, was rightly deferred, and House Bill 287, which would have created a huge exemption in the Uniform Information Practices Act, which requires open access to government records, was amended to remove some of its worst elements.

But advocates know not to let down their guard, and are keeping a close eye on these and other measures that could, if enacted, erode the general public's involvement in the government they fund through their tax dollars. Loathsome provisions thought put to rest have been known to rise anew in the waning days of past legislative sessions.

The state Office of Information Practices (OIP), which promotes government transparency, has been monitoring 105 bills this legislative session that relate directly to OIP or the two open-government laws it administers.

Many won't survive the session, of course, as is true of any issue. And not all the bills are threatening. Some are simple housekeeping measures and others, if enacted, would boost government outreach and likely improve citizen engagement, such as Senate Bill 475, which would allow for the electronic posting of meeting notices under the Sunshine Law. But a troubling number do seek to chip away at the public's right to know, and those alarming attempts must not succeed.

The people of Hawaii, especially those employed by the county or state governments,

and most especially those who are elected to office, must learn and embrace the tenets of the Sunshine Law and UIPA. Knowing these laws is the first step to defending them. The laws' requirements are not onerous. OIP provides links to the laws in Hawaii Revised Statutes, along with easy-to-understand guides outlining their provisions and even training videos explaining how to apply the laws at its website, [oip.hawaii.gov](http://oip.hawaii.gov). (The site also has a list of some of the bills the office is following, under the "What's New" heading).

It's worth emphasizing all this because one of the deferred measures that was introduced indicates a lack of understanding of the laws' requirements, even among elected officials.

Senate Bill 1210 purportedly was introduced because members of the Maui County Council wanted to be able to attend community meetings without violating the Sunshine Law, which prohibits unofficial or private meetings that more than two members of a government panel attend and at which they discuss official business.

But the Council can already do just that, thanks to a "limited meeting" provision approved last year that allows all members to jointly attend public community meetings, as long as they meet certain conditions, such as providing six days notice that they will be there.

Elected officials and policymakers must be available to the public they profess to serve, to ensure that limited special interests do not hold sway in vital decisions that affect the health and welfare of those not at the table.

Democracy is not always the most efficient process, it's true. But the time lost to properly notifying the public that a meeting is being held, that important decisions are to be made, and that all are welcome at the proceedings, is a small price to pay for having a fully representational government.