



## 2026 Sunshine Week Op-Ed

### Letter from the Editor: It's cloudy this Sunshine Week. Two people can part the skies

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Every Sunshine Week, the Michigan Press Association honors a public official who advances open government. This year, for the first time, we're giving no award.

That's how cloudy it is over transparency in Michigan.

"Unfortunately, this year's legislative and policy landscape does not reflect the progress or commitment to openness that the award is designed to celebrate," the MPA said in advance of Sunshine Week, which begins March 15.

"Rather than closing that gap, the past year has seen little forward movement - and in some cases, proposals that would further restrict access."

Sunshine Week is an annual observance by news organizations across America, advocating for better access to government dealings and documents, more transparency by public officials and stronger laws for accountability.

After decades of advocacy and broken promises, Michigan remains the only state in the nation that exempts the governor's office from the Freedom of Information Act. It's also one of just two states where FOIA does not apply to the Legislature. Let that sink in: Dead last. Michigan isn't just lagging - it's the only state still operating with this level of secrecy.

As president of the MPA this year, I support the board's decision. No public official stood out as a champion of reform. But one public official earned responsibility for stopping real reform: Speaker of the House Matt Hall (R-Richland Township).

In 2024, when Democrats controlled the House, then-Republican Leader Hall urged them to strengthen transparency laws: "It's crucial to support proposals that enhance transparency in our government, including stricter requirements for the governor and state departments to disclose documents and communications," he wrote at the time. "Over the past five years, numerous reports have highlighted the administration's widespread overuse of privileges, long delays, excessive redactions, and denials in response to records requests."

Those were strong words - and they turned out to be only words.

After Republicans won control and Hall became Speaker, the Senate passed Bills 1 and 2 to expand FOIA to the governor's office and Legislature. The reforms were finally within reach.

Hall declared them "dead" and "a very low priority." In November, he told reporters plainly: "We're just not going to do FOIA." The public overwhelmingly supports reform: An EPIC-MRA poll commissioned by the MPA found 89 percent of Michigan voters support expanding FOIA to the governor and Legislature – across party lines, across regions.

If this was on the ballot, it would pass in a landslide.

The failure is bipartisan and longstanding. Governor Gretchen Whitmer campaigned in 2018 on an eight-page Michigan Sunshine Plan that promised to expand FOIA to her own office. When Democrats controlled both chambers in 2022, the opportunity was there.

It didn't happen.

Transparency should not depend on who holds the gavel. It should not depend on who occupies the governor's office. It should not be weaponized when convenient and abandoned when power changes hands.

Right now, one person can allow a vote on Senate Bills 1 and 2: Speaker Hall. And one person can sign them into law: Governor Whitmer.

Sen. Jeremy Moss (D-Southfield), co-author of the bills, put it plainly: "If this were put up for a vote in the House, it would pass. There's no doubt. It has the votes."

So, what are we waiting for?

Michigan citizens deserve to know how decisions are made, how money is spent, and how power is exercised. They deserve a government that does not hide behind exemptions no other state tolerates.

Sunshine Week is about accountability. This year let's put the accountability squarely where it belongs.  
Speaker Hall: Allow a vote.

Governor Whitmer: Sign the reforms.

Lawmakers in both parties: Stop hiding behind leadership and stand with your constituents.

No more empty rhetoric. No more campaign promises. No more delay.

Let the sun in.