

# Texans on the Left and Right Agree

## *It's Time for Transparency in Economic Development*

Texans deserve to know what's going on in their government.

This foundational principle for good governance has been an essential part of the independent spirit of our state since the very beginning. It is also why Texas has laws designed to allow citizens access to the inner workings of both state and local government.

The most prominent of these are the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Texas Public Information Act. These laws function to ensure, respectively, that government meetings are open to the public and that information created in the conduct of government business is available for public request. The result is that most policy discussions occur in publicly held meetings with publicly available materials.

Unfortunately, the laws have serious gaps. The most glaring of these is that, in both the Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act, discussion and deliberation on economic development matters—such as when governing bodies decide to use public money to incentivize private corporations—are completely exempt. While final votes must be taken in public, the substantive public policy discussion, as well as any written materials related to it, can occur among the entirety of the governing body in closed session meetings without any public scrutiny whatsoever.

Texans should be allowed to see the discussion and deliberation on incentives among their elected officials, and have opportunities to make their voice heard. This is a public policy matter that is worthy of public scrutiny, and should not be treated any different than a budgetary or other matter.

The undersigned organizations don't agree on everything, but we all believe that people deserve to see what's going on in their government. The current special exceptions for economic development in the Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act do not allow this.

We call on the Texas Legislature to repeal Section 551.087 of the Open Meetings Act and Section 552.131 of the Public Information Act, and enact measures to ensure full public involvement in, and understanding of, what's happening in their government with regards to economic development incentives.

The people of Texas deserve more openness in government. This principle unites all of us—whether on the left or right—and serves all Texans.

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