

## Republicans' Brazen Attack on Open Government Continues

Written by Wisconsin Assembly, Laura Smith

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### ***Newest Speaker Vos Proposal Will Severely Restrict Records Access***

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MADISON – Today, Assembly Democratic Leader Peter Barca (D-Kenosha) released the following statement on the latest brazen Republican attack on open government. Records show that Speaker Robin Vos sought to weaken open records laws so they are only subject to legislative rules:

“Here they go again! When it comes to hiding government business from the people of Wisconsin, Republicans can’t seem to get enough.

“This Republican assault on democracy is outrageous and cannot stand.

“Democrats believe we should be going in the exact opposite direction and that’s why I have proposed efforts to enshrine our open records laws into the state constitution.”

Last week, Rep. Barca and Senator Kathleen Vinehout (D-Alma) introduced three legislative proposals to formalize the legislature’s open records laws into state rules and the constitution. The Barca and Vinehout proposals would:

- Add Open Meetings Law to Legislative Rules (Legislative Resolutions) - LRB [3039](#) , [2935](#) , and [3040](#)
- Permanently Apply Open Records Law (Constitutional Amendment) - LRB [2930](#) (Rep. Chris Taylor - lead author)
- Permanently Apply Open Meetings Law to the Legislature (Constitutional Amendment) -

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LRB      [2944](#)

The open records amendment would be the first consideration to make open records access a right for citizens under the Wisconsin State Constitution. The proposal recognizes that Wisconsin's commitment to open records should be nothing short of a constitutional guarantee.

The open meetings constitutional amendment would close a loophole and hold the legislature to the same standards of openness and transparency as city councils, school boards and all other government agencies. Specifically, the amendment would require the legislature to enact laws requiring reasonable notice of and public access to meetings of the legislature and other government bodies. It also makes it possible for legislators to be subject to citations and civil penalties for violating the law.

In addition to legislation that would amend the state constitution to permanently close the legislature's loophole in the open meetings law, the Legislature can act to apply the open meetings law to itself right now by adding the open meetings law to its legislative rules.

In recent years, open records requests have helped shed light on everything from potential corruption at Governor Walker's jobs agency to criminal activity that led to the convictions of six of the governor's former aides, as well as the revelation that major mining company donors essentially re-wrote large sections of Wisconsin's environmental laws. In addition, almost all Republican legislators signed a secrecy oath to not inform the public during the last redistricting process.