

Tomari Quinn, editor of The Topeka Capital-Journal
616 S.E. Jefferson, Topeka, Kan. 66607
tomari.quinn@cjonline.com
(785) 295-1212

Journalists at The Topeka Capital-Journal appreciate the Senate State and Federal Affairs Committee's consideration of this bill and thank Sen. LaTurner for bringing it forward. We believe a transparent and open government fosters trust in its citizens, while the opposite serves only to breed suspicion and malcontent. In recent years, we have faced greater challenges in getting information that should be easily available to the public, and we have seen government agencies asking for ever increasing fees to comply with the requests. Following are a few examples to illustrate:

- After receiving a tip that the Kansas Department of Agriculture was failing in its duties to ensure the accuracy of grain and livestock scales, backed up by court documents from a recent lawsuit, reporter Andy Marso submitted an open records request last year for the scale test reports that the company named in the suit submitted to the department. The request was denied as the company was under "administrative adjudication." Marso resubmitted the request in January, after the adjudication ended in a \$1,000 fine he was told was uncommonly low. What followed was a week's worth of back-and-forth emails in which the department initially quoted him an estimated price of \$700 for copies of the records. He made several attempts to mitigate the costs, including requesting an in-person inspection of the records (which is specifically allowed by law) and proposing to bring his own scanner/copier. He was informed he could inspect the records in person only if a Department of Agriculture attorney was present, at a cost of \$20 per hour. Marso paid for three hours of inspection time. The attorney brought him the records one scale location at a time, therefore causing dead time in which he had no documents to scan but was paying for her services.
- Several times since joining the city of Topeka in August 2012, the city manager cited his efforts toward transparency. We long had found the city attorney's office searches far and wide to find ways to reject KORA requests in whole and part. To test the city's new attitude, reporter Aly Van Dyke requested 14 weeks of the city manager's emails. She was told the cost would be \$273 and paid it. Weeks later, she was given one week's emails, 79 percent of which had been redacted. Cost for attorney review – which wasn't cited in the original cost estimate – was more than \$180, the amount of which was taken from our original payment. One city department often cites a copying fee of more than 25 cents a page, claiming city ordinance allows it and outranks state statute.
- Payroll requests were sent to 55 Shawnee County taxing entities. Costs to fulfill our requests ranged from \$0 to \$280. One agency with fewer than 20 employees asked for \$212. We have paid almost \$1,300, with one request still outstanding (and two months late complying). Payroll information is something every citizen has the right to, but not everyone can afford \$1,300.

We thank you for your time today and encourage any efforts to build trust within our community by making information widely and easily available to the citizens of Kansas.