

# ***Legal Briefs***

## ***News You Can Use from the City of Oakland Office of the City Attorney***

*Legal Briefs is a series of essays by City Attorney John Russo to update the community on key projects, major initiatives and important legal developments in the Office of the City Attorney.*

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### **SHINING LIGHT ON OAKLAND CITY GOVERNMENT**

In the Office of the City Attorney, we believe it is the government's job to conduct the people's business on behalf of the people, accountable to the people and in full view of the people. Our Open Government Program, the first of its kind in California, was created to facilitate access to public records and enhance community participation in public meetings.

#### ***Your Guide to Open Government: Now Available in Four Languages***

Many people don't know their rights under local and state open government laws, and the full text of these laws is formidable. To simplify things, the Open Government Program has created a simple, user-friendly guide to the three laws governing open government in Oakland: the Oakland Sunshine Ordinance, the California Public Records Act, and the Ralph M. Brown Act (state open meeting law). The guide also includes the ***Oakland Citizens' Open Government Bill of Rights***, which synthesizes the rights conferred by local and state laws regarding access to city government in plain, concise language.

***Your Guide to Open Government*** has been recently updated and is now available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. To obtain a copy, call the Open Government Coordinator, Michelle Abney, at (510) 238-2965 or find it online at [www.oaklandcityattorney.org/opengov.html](http://www.oaklandcityattorney.org/opengov.html).

## City Attorney John Russo Wins “Beacon Award” for Open Government

Last month the California First Amendment Coalition (CFAC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and defending the people’s right to know, awarded City Attorney John Russo with the prestigious “Beacon Award” in recognition of his dynamic leadership and commitment to promoting public access to government at the local and state level. According to CFAC, “Beacon awards are given to individuals or organizations that have done exemplary work in the area of keeping government meetings or records open to the public” and those “who have gone above and beyond the norm to assure government transparency.”

CFAC recognized City Attorney Russo for his dedication to open government as demonstrated by the following accomplishments:

- Helped author Oakland’s “Sunshine Ordinance” with the League of Women Voters
- Created Oakland’s innovative Open Government Program
- Developed the *Open Government Bill of Rights* and *Your Guide to Open Government* to inform the public of their rights under local and state law
- As President of the League of California Cities, worked hard to secure the League of California Cities’ support of SCA-1, a constitutional amendment proposed for the November 2004 ballot to expand public access to government records and meetings. The League had strongly opposed a previous version of this amendment.

In the Office of the City Attorney, we are honored by this prestigious award and will continue our commitment to shine light on city government.