

Op-Ed: Sunshine Week encourages dialogue about fundamentals of good government

March 13-19 is Government in the Sunshine Week here in Florida, and a great opportunity to discuss how important public access is to government records and open meetings — a fundamental component of good government. Clerks of Court throughout the state are observing transparency and accountability in government and celebrating our role in providing residents with easy access to important public, court and historic records.

Maintaining transparency and equal access to public information is a core responsibility of your Clerk of Court. In Florida, we have the most expansive open government laws in the United States, most notably our “Sunshine Law.” This landmark legislation guarantees public access to government meetings and records and supports residents who want to be actively involved in policymaking in their communities.

Florida's Clerks of Court and Comptrollers play an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability of local government, as we work to provide efficient access to public documents such as court records and audits. Here’s how:

- The Clerk’s office provides citizens access to public documents, including court records, Board of County Commission meeting minutes and audits. In Fiscal Year 2020, our office recorded 111,173 documents.
- The Comptroller side of our office ensures access to county financial information, including financial records, expenses, and contracts.
- In many counties, Florida's Clerks of Court and Comptrollers offer fraud services, such as hotlines and departments, to give the public a place to report and shed light on allegations of fraud, waste and other abuses in county and municipal government. Here in St. Johns County, our Office of the Inspector General fulfills this critical mission.
- The Clerk’s office enhances access to public information by providing more official documents and services online, including payment for traffic citations and court fees, property fraud alerts, access to information about unclaimed funds, certified records such as wills and divorce decrees, document recording, and jury duty response.

I am immensely proud of the Clerk’s office mission and staff dedicated to ensuring the public’s trust in our government.

As of the end of 2021, the Pew Research Center found that only 22% of Americans say they trust their governments “most of the time” and only 2% say they trust them “just about always.” We can do better than that in St. Johns County.

Our team at the Clerk’s office is committed to an accessible, transparent relationship with St. Johns County residents, one that engenders trust, meets or exceeds your expectations, and demonstrates our daily commitment to accuracy and integrity.

To learn more about your county government, visit our Guide to St. Johns County’s Finances at <https://bit.ly/3HY2aJB>.

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