

PUBLIC TESTIMONY SUMMARY

I-900 STATE AUDITOR'S PERFORMANCE AUDIT:

Open Public Records Practices at 30 Government Entities (May 19, 2008)

As Heard by the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Sub-Committee on I-900 Performance Audits
on June 18, 2008

The performance audit being discussed at this hearing was conducted solely and independently by the office of the State Auditor, under the authority of legislation approved by the voters in Initiative 900. The State Auditor is elected directly by the people of the State of Washington and operates independently of the Legislature and the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee. Staff to the Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee prepare a summary of public testimony on State Auditor reports. These summaries are for informational purposes only, and do not serve as an assessment by committee staff of the findings and recommendations issued by the State Auditor nor do they reflect a staff opinion on legislative intent.

Title: Open Public Records Practices at 30 Government Entities

Audit Scope and Objectives:

This performance audit was designed to answer the following question: How effective were ten selected cities, ten selected counties, and ten selected state agencies at responding to ten public records requests in a prompt and cooperative manner?

The audit objective was to evaluate performance of the selected entities in responding to public records requests. The Public Records Act and the Washington Attorney General's model rules on public records practices provided benchmarks and best practices for the evaluations of entities' performance. The SAO conducted its work from November 2006 through March 2008.

SAO Findings:

Overarching Conclusion: The audit work revealed that, by and large, most of the 30 entities audited are providing good customer service in responding to public records requests. SAO identified best practices that the audited entities should consider in order to improve their performance. The overarching conclusion is that most of the selected entities responded cooperatively and in a timely manner to the public record requests.

SAO Recommendations:

Overarching Recommendations:

- SAO recommends that entities institute as many elements as possible from the best practices in this report and the Washington Attorney General's model rules regarding paper and electronic records;
- The Washington Attorney General's Office should create standard, formal training curriculum, which may or may not include a credential, for all public records officers in the state based on the model rules. The Washington Legislature should provide funding to the Attorney General's Office to establish and maintain this training curriculum. The State and each local government will be responsible for arranging the training for its public records officer(s) and ensuring

	new public records officers receive the training.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SAO recommends entities consider tracking costs associated with responding to requests as a tool that management can use to determine appropriate levels of staffing and resources.
Agency Responses in Audit Report?	Yes, in Appendix A for counties; Appendix B for cities; and Appendix C for state agencies.
Legislative Action Requested?	Yes; as part of the second overarching recommendation, SAO indicates the Legislature should provide funding to the Attorney General's Office to establish and maintain a public records training curriculum.

Staff Summary of Testimony from Audited Agencies:

The eight state Cabinet agencies had a 94 percent success rate, as defined by the State Auditor's Office. The Legislature has been clear in statute in setting a performance standard for response to public records requests, and the state agencies performed admirably. The Governor embraces the idea of openness in agency responses to record requests. Washington State government was recently recognized by the Pew Center as one of the top three states for sharing information. Steps that the state agencies are taking to improve performance include increased signage, training for contracted security personnel, and a server where state agencies can list their requests.

Staff Summary of Testimony from Other Parties:

(No testimony from other parties.)

Agencies Testifying:

The Office of Financial Management (Victor Moore, Director)

Other Parties Testifying:

None