

# THE BROWN ACT

OPEN MEETINGS FOR  
LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES



**2003**

CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY  
GENERAL'S OFFICE

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ACT

OPEN MEETINGS FOR  
LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODIES

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**Office of the Attorney General**

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Throughout California's history, local legislative bodies have played a vital role in bringing participatory democracy to the citizens of the state. Local legislative bodies - such as boards, councils and commissions - are created in recognition of the fact that several minds are better than one, and that through debate and discussion, the best ideas will emerge. The law which guarantees the public's right to attend and participate in meetings of local legislative bodies is the Ralph M. Brown Act.

While local legislative bodies generally are required to hold meetings in open forum, the Brown Act recognizes the need, under limited circumstances, for these bodies to meet in private in order to carry out their responsibilities in the best interests of the public. For example, the law contains a personnel exception based on notions of personal privacy, and a pending litigation exception based upon the precept that government agencies should not be disadvantaged in planning litigation strategy. Although the principle of open meetings initially seems simple, application of the law to real life situations can prove to be quite complex.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide a brief description of the Brown Act, along with a discussion of court decisions and opinions of this office that add to our understanding by applying it in specific factual contexts. We hope this pamphlet will assist both public officials and those who monitor the performance of local legislative bodies to minimize and resolve disputes over interpretations of the Brown Act. In recent years, both the California Supreme Court and the courts of appeal have recognized the benefit of pamphlets issued by our office. This recognition by the courts, along with many favorable comments from members of the public, strengthens our resolve to continue producing reliable informational materials on the Brown Act and other California laws. Publication of these materials constitutes a tradition of service that we value greatly.

Ideas and suggestions for future editions of this pamphlet are welcomed and should be addressed to the editor.

Sincerely,

BILL LOCKYER  
Attorney General























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