

NEWS RELEASE

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OPEN GOVERNMENT ADVOCATE ARTHUR WEST RECOGNIZED WITH KEY AWARD FOR UNCOVERING STATE LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD'S ILLEGAL MEETINGS

Attorney Arthur West held the Liquor Control Board accountable for holding secret meetings where they discussed issues related to regulating legalized marijuana. He invoked the state Public Records Act to obtain documentation that confirmed the closures, and a Thurston County judge agreed that the Liquor Control Board was guilty of at least 17 violations of the Open Public Meetings Act.

For his work using Washington's access laws to reveal the Liquor Control Board's illegal actions, on February 13 the Washington Coalition for Open Government is presenting West a Key Award, given to organizations or individuals who do something notable to advance the cause of open government.

West determined that the Liquor Control Board sought regulatory authority of marijuana – including medical marijuana, long allowed in Washington – after voters approved I-502 legalizing recreational marijuana. The three board members met secretly with law enforcement and local government officials as they traveled around the state for public hearings on issues of marijuana regulation. But under the state Open Public Meetings Law, all such gatherings should have been open to the public.

“West is known as a public records gadfly, because he has dogged governmental agencies with records requests and lawsuits promoting government transparency,” said Toby Nixon, president of the Washington Coalition for Open Government. “However, he often wins. In this case, West properly called out officials who should have known better -- the three members of the state Liquor Control Board -- for meeting privately, without proper notice.”

In late 2014, a Thurston County judge ruled the three Liquor Control Board members had violated the Open Public Meetings Act. The board settled with West, paying him \$192,000 for his agreement to drop his suit and withdraw all his public records requests and lawsuits against them, and to refrain from future requests of the Liquor Control Board.

Join WCOG and help in the non-partisan fight for transparent government and open public participation. WCOG was founded in 2002 by a group of individuals representing organizations with a broad spectrum of opinions and interests but all dedicated to the principles of strengthening the state's open government laws and protecting the public's access to government at all levels. WCOG stands for the principle that transparency and public participation are essential building blocks of good government.

Membership is open to the public. For more information contact WCOG at 6351 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664, on the web at www.washingtoncog.org, or call (206) 782-0393.