

## **Maine Freedom of Information Coalition**

### **Public Records Audit**

#### **PROTOCOL**

In order for our final report to have validity, we must all follow the same guidelines.

- Go to the office in person to request the information. You may call ahead to get directions or verify hours, but do not make your request over the phone. Make it in person.
- Dress as you believe a citizen would. No need for a suit/dress, but please dress neatly. Students should not wear sweatshirts or carry notebooks with school insignia.
- Be polite and persistent, but not rude or antagonistic.
- Plan ahead. Do not arrive at an office five minutes before it closes. This only gives the office an additional excuse not to give you the information you requested. It also opens the Coalition's data up to criticism if we don't allow a reasonable amount of time for public employees to respond.
- Beware of the lunch hour, especially in smaller towns where employees frequently close the office for lunch. If the office is closed during the lunch hour, please note that on the evaluation sheet under the comments section at the end.
- The law does not require you to identify yourself in any way. This includes your name, address, driver's license number, occupation, etc. The law does not require that you give a reason for your interest in the requested document. If any of this information is requested, simply ask: Is that information required for me to look at the record? Please note the response on your evaluation form.
- Try not to let the staff know that you are participating in this Coalition project. We are attempting to simulate an ordinary citizen's experience and divulging information may influence the staff to give you information that he/she might not otherwise provide.
- If you are asked to complete any paperwork to receive the information, you may need to leave your name, home address and home telephone number. If you are a student, please don't leave your dormitory address or your professor's name, number, etc.
- Be prepared to make a second trip to the office. Sometimes supervisors are out of the office and secretaries are hesitant to release information. If a second trip is required to view the document, please note that on the evaluation form. Please also note if you were denied access to information because a supervisor was on vacation or the office is understaffed. Please also note how long you were told you would have to wait for access.
- Please note on the bottom of the evaluation form whether there was any confrontation between you and the public official/employee, and the details of that confrontation.
- And, finally, the evaluation form has a space for your name and phone number. This information will be provided to Maine's print and broadcast media and you may be called for an interview.