

Edgar County Watchdogs, Inc. (NFP)
Box 124, 7060 Illinois Highway 1
Paris, Illinois 61944
www.ecwd.press

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Summary of our work since 2011

By Kirk Allen and John Kraft

About the Edgar County Watchdogs, Inc.

"Follow the law, it's not hard"

The Edgar County Watchdogs ("ECWd") is a not-for-profit corporation licensed to conduct business and to solicit donations in Illinois. It was formed in 2011 after Kirk Allen and John Kraft met at a dinner for a newly elected Sheriff and discussed problems with local governments in Edgar County. During that dinner, Kirk and John co-founded what has turned out to be the premier watchdog model and organization in the state of Illinois and has expanded into several other states.

ECWd and its co-founders are news media and members of the Media Law Resource Center, Investigative Reporters and Editors, Society of Professional Journalists, and the Chicago Headline Club.

Their goal is to hold local government accountable to the laws they are bound by and expose those unwilling to do so. They don't simply write a story and move on; they stick with it until the problem is solved.

With a founding principle of always gathering information which will get to the truth, no matter what it is, and publishing the actual documents used when writing about issues, ECWd has become a formidable force in local governments today.

Its focus on compliance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act have become primary tools in their local government investigations.

ECWd assists others in gathering and interpreting public records, and others have assisted them in the same. Never charging for their services, ECWd routinely attends meetings, asks for public records, and writes articles focused on compliance with whatever laws a particular unit of local government must comply with.

ECWd works on tips submitted through email, telephone messaging, or anonymously through its Sync folder. They work to verify any tips given and publish their findings. As of this writing, the ECWd has ousted 474 public officials or employees out of office, either through indictments, resignations, terminations, or election losses.

The ECWd has been published and cited in numerous publications across the United States; from newspapers, television, business journals, legal journals and even a book, the watchdogs have proven to be a source of verified information for other news outlets, as well as for the public. Their model of investigate-publish-hold them accountable could and should become a national movement, as it is nonpartisan, nonpolitical, and can be used by the average person who has a little time to invest.

ECWd's sister organization, American Watchdogs, Inc., is a 501(c)(3), which holds training sessions in towns across the country teaching people how to hold their local governments accountable to the law, and to do so in a nonviolent fashion.

What follows is a compilation of and short description of our work in various segments of Illinois local governments. This list is not all inclusive and does not represent the many positive interactions, advice, and responses we have given and received from units of local government.

This could not have been accomplished without help from others who have assisted us.

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Our Typical Investigative Process

When we receive a tip about an alleged problem with a unit of local government, we research the allegations to ascertain if it is a legitimate complaint. We then conduct our investigation by using some or all of the below, depending on the allegations:

- Meeting minutes of the public body
- Meeting agendas of the public body
- Statement of Economic Interest of members of the public body
- Qualifications and disqualifications of office
- Conflicts of Interest
- Emails and other communications
- Any other public records which might lead to verifying the tip, including financial statements, contracts, purchases, credit cards, cell phones, and vehicle use policies.
- We also research the compensation of elected officials to make sure what they are receiving is what they are authorized to receive according to the public body's approved compensation setting ordinance or resolution
- Research state laws, Attorney General opinions, case law, and government association publications on the subject matter we are investigating

During and after our continuing records review, we contact the public body with questions, and inform them of our findings, and what we believe they should do to fix any problems we may have found.

We typically speak during public comment at a public meeting, and we always video tape public meetings we attend.

At times our interactions may be somewhat argumentative when faced with a public body not wishing to comply with state law. There are also many times where we have minimal interactions because the public body researched the issues we presented and agreed to fix the problem.

There is no typical investigation timeline. Some involve nothing more than a FOIA request or an email to the person in charge, some only one meeting attendance, while a few have lasted years.

We also field questions daily from public officials, public employees, and the general public. We remind them we are not attorneys, then give them advice, which for the most part consists of reading the applicable law and applying the words as written.

We apply the law as written, while taking into consideration Attorney General opinions and established case law and local Ordinance.

Airport Authorities

Airport Authorities in the state of Illinois are required to comply with the [Airport Authorities Act](#) or the [Interstate Airport Authorities Act](#), among many others.

One of the first requirements we noticed in an airport authority was disqualification of commissioners from serving if they were also an officer or employee of any unit of local government (or an elected state or federal official), with the only exception being in counties with a population under 40,000, in which case a commissioner could be employed by a local school district. Commissioners also had to be residents of the authority (live within its boundaries).

When researching the legislative reasoning for these disqualifications, we found they were based on conflicts of interest between officers or employees of two separate taxing public bodies. The Illinois Supreme Court entered a judgment of Ouster of all commissioners of the Sangamon County Airport Authority citing the conflict in offices in [People v Bartholf](#) in 1944. Subsequent to the Supreme Court decision, the Illinois Legislature amended the Airport Authorities Act.

When determining disqualifications, we review each commissioner's statement of economic interest for other employment, and we review property tax records for residency. When finding a potential disqualification, we notify the offending airport authority. When they fail to correct the disqualification, we notify the Illinois Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics and ask them to comply with the law and require the authority to schedule a hearing where the commissioner would have to show cause why he should not be removed from office.

The Illinois Attorney General, on inquiry from the Vermillion County State's Attorney, issued an opinion on disqualifications, and their opinion validated our findings in every aspect.

Our findings related to airport authorities resulted in 16 resignations, as detailed below.

Commissioner Disqualifications – Conflict in office and residency requirements

- Springfield Airport Authority had three disqualified commissioners. One was a township trustee, one was a commissioner of a regional planning commission, and one was a member of the county court's jury commission. All commissioners "cured" their conflicts. One resigned from his elected position as township trustee, one resigned from the airport authority, and one resigned from the jury commission. Technically the office vacated should have been the office most recently assumed, but we were content with those three commissioners attempting to do the right thing.
- Bloomington-Normal Airport Authority had a commissioner disqualified. She was also an appointed member of a municipal subsidiary board. She resigned from the authority.
- Quad-City International Airport – Rock Island Airport Authority had two disqualified commissioners. A board chairman who did not reside within the authority and was also a fire district trustee, and a commissioner who was a board member of a municipal library. The first commissioner resigned from the authority, the second resigned from the library board.

- Vermillion County Airport Authority had four of its five commissioners disqualified. One was a municipal alderman, one was chairman of a soil and water conservation district and did not reside within the district, one was an employee of the local community college and did not reside within the authority, and one was an appointed member of a municipal planning commission. Three of them resigned from the authority, and one resigned from the planning commission.
- DuPage County Airport Authority had two disqualified commissioners. One was also a member of a municipal Civil Service Commission, and the other was employed by a park district. Both resigned from their conflicted positions.
- Rockford Airport Authority had one disqualified commissioner. A commissioner was also a member of a municipal zoning overlay review committee. She resigned from the municipal committee.
- Coles County Airport Authority had one disqualified commissioner who was also an employee of the local school district, which is in a county of more than 40,000 people. He resigned from the authority.
- Kewanee Airport Authority had one commissioner disqualified. She was also a county board member. She resigned from the authority.
- Kankakee County Airport Authority had one commissioner disqualified for improperly contracting with the authority (and with the authority's attorney approving the contract). He resigned from the authority. The attorney for the authority was either terminated or resigned.

Improper Airport Authority Real Estate Taxation

While reviewing property tax records of airport authority commissioners, we found some commissioners were not being taxed by the authority on the real estate of their residence, even though they resided within the townships making up the authority.

Further review indicated the statutory method of forming an airport authority included a referendum for each township who wished to be included within the authority. The townships whose residents approved the referendum at an election were included within the boundaries of the authority.

In the case of the Vermillion County Airport Authority, local farmers filed suit to be excluded from the authority, which exempted their real estate from the tax. A 1947 court decision removed the subject farmland from the authority, provided such farmland remained in excess of 20 acres and used exclusively for farming, and did not make any taxable real estate non-contiguous. This left a patchwork of taxable vs nontaxable properties, and a "shot-gun" approach for the airport authority boundaries.

Vermillion County Airport Authority had, for nearly 75 years, improperly over-taxed property owners within the authority, while failing to tax those properties which no longer complied with the 1947 court order of being at least 20 acres in size and used for farming. Add to that, a more recent tax code change removed farm residences from being taxed as farmland, making a separate taxable parcel on the residence.

- Vermillion County Airport Authority commissioners and attorney, along with a local resident who spent time researching the issue, took our advice and filed a court action to reattach all available real estate which no longer complied with the 1947 court order. This does not include those farm residences affected by the tax law change, but it is on their radar. As a result of our investigation, the airport authority reattached almost 7000 parcels to the authority and increased its Equalized Assessed Value by about 40%, which will lower the real estate taxes paid by approximately 30% for those parcels who had been overtaxed in the past.
- Rockford Airport Authority. We notified the authority's attorney of the issue, with sample random findings and a listing of real estate within the townships making up the authority who are not currently being taxed by the authority. We will continue working on this issue with them and should have it resolved in the coming months.
- Rock Island Airport Authority has the same issues as the Rockford Airport Authority, and we suspect most of the other authorities within the state of Illinois have similar problems.
- This issue will continue for the foreseeable future, when we have time to research each authority

School Districts

School Districts are governed by the [Illinois School Code](#). We have found school districts are known for First Amendment violations of public commenters during meetings, and open meetings violations related to public comment. As far as suspected criminal activity, let's just say when it goes wrong in a school district, it goes really wrong.

Shiloh School District

Superintendent contract not renewed. Shiloh School District hired a school superintendent knowing he had been arrested, charged, and convicted of sexual battery [of a child] while working as a guidance counselor in Thornwood High School in 1989. They never informed the parents.

When there were closed door discussions of his contract renewal, we let the public know of his past conviction, that the school board knew about it when they hired him, that he was terminated from his last school district after their parents found out, and how if parents stood silent this time, his contract would be renewed.

We only found out about this conviction when we unearthed a Motion the superintendent made to have his record expunged, and the expungement was denied by the Cook County Court as ineligible for expungement. His conviction remains. He was, however, grandfathered into the school system and could work in a school, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

Iroquois West

School superintendent resigned after we wrote about a \$25 million Bond referendum the school district was attempting to pass. The referendum failed at the election. We also exposed the school board retreat being held at the superintendent's home in Missouri, and she was charging the school rent for the board retreat.

School board president resigned after we published his conflict of interest for being on the school board while also the county supervisor of assessments.

Milford School District

Stopped self-dealing contracts with board members after we obtained public records under FOIA which pointed to three school board members self-dealing \$81K+ in contracts to themselves. The school board stopped the illegal practice.

Sherrard School District

Superintendent resigned after we submitted a FOIA request for public records.

Springfield School District

One conviction. Board chairman resigned and was later convicted for defrauding his relatives of millions as their financial advisor. His troubles started when we exposed his financial dealings with hosting a high school basketball tournament, and his conflicts of interest in the tournament.

Lincoln-Way School District

Twenty-two indictments, fourteen resignations. One superintendent received six indictments from a federal grand jury. It is still working its way through the federal court system. One Booster Club Secretary indicted on sixteen counts. We exposed the superintendent for grant-related fraud, using school district funds and property to open a “Superdog Training school” and hiring a dog trainer to train his personal dogs, using school personnel to work on his private home, and permitted a coach to live in a house on school property without paying rent or real estate taxes. The FBI got involved in this school district. The list of resignations is extensive and include the board president, business director, three board members, a resignation from a private university and a Philharmonic orchestra, resignation from a Lutheran School Board, two foundation resignations, Athletic Director, Athletic support employee, booster club secretary, assistant principal, and driver’s education teacher.

Effingham School District

School board president did not run for reelection, citing our investigations into the district as his reason.

Library Districts

Library Districts in Illinois operate under the [Public Library District Act](#).

For the most part, we have found library districts to be one of the most retaliatory entities in Illinois local government, second only to school districts. No matter which records are requested, most libraries we researched immediately involved their attorney, and made subtle references to the public records requester not liking children and libraries. One even went so far as repeatedly filing false police reports in their attempt at discrediting a mother who was upset about child pornography being accessed in the library, and the library condoning it through their silence – *“Qui tacet consentire videtur” – Silence equals consent.*

Library Districts have an elected board of trustees, who serve without compensation, and must be residents of the district. Trustees must comply with the public officer prohibited activities act and refrain from financial and other conflicts of interest.

Orland Park Library District

One resignation of Library Director. One of the first library districts we received a tip on dealt with library patrons accessing child pornography on library computers and fondling their privates while at

those computer terminals, with library staff basically turning a blind eye to the problem – even going as far as taking pro-active steps to ensure no evidence would be collectable by a police investigator. A [book was published](#) about this library and its actions concerning child pornography access in the library.

We also exposed two board members who took trips to Las Vegas on library funds, and the board who were gifted gold, silver, and other jewelry, had late fees waived, and flagrant public meetings and open records violations.

Atlanta Library District

In this library, we dealt with rampant self-dealing, conflicts of interest in board members, and financial improprieties. We found so much wrongdoing at this library, it needs to be bullet points:

- One resignation, building donated to district. Library board member self-dealing while leasing space to the library, attempting to sell a building to the district, leasing back space he sold to the district, gifting restaurant contract to relatives, filing false statements of economic interest, checks written to himself, and more. This board member was investigated by the Secretary of State for violations of the Public Officer Prohibited Activities Act, however, days prior to the administrative hearing, he resigned from office and donated the building he had previously attempted to sell to the district. This resulted in the Secretary of State finding the allegations to be simple mistakes – even though he provided false information during the hearing.
- Two resignations of board members.
- One resignation of district's attorney.
- One resignation of district's bookkeeper, who was also employed by self-dealing trustee.
- Six candidates removed from the ballot for not filing the required paperwork with the county clerk.

Onarga Library District

This district illegally removed one of its board members from office. They did not possess the authority to remove a board member. They also failed to comply with open meetings and open records laws. The district changed its policies to comply with state laws.

Lisle Library District

One ouster. A library trustee did not live in the district and spearheaded attempts at exempting trustees from rules they apply to citizens on the use of the library and fees.

Park Districts

Illinois Park Districts are governed by the [Park District Code](#). One of the major problems we have uncovered across the state is park district commissioners receiving comp'd services and merchandise - not only for themselves, but for their family members, and in some cases for former commissioners and those family members for the rest of their lives. The Park District Code says commissioners work without compensation, yet we have found attorneys for these districts trying to justify the giveaways. Imagine having free golf for life...

Clark County Park District

Attorney resigned; two executive directors resigned, one commissioner resigned, contracted FOIA Officer resigned, four commissioners replaced. This Park District was attempting to "lease" part of its

real estate for a private subdivision. The problems arose when the public was informed of this subdivision – the same public who lost their real estate in the formation of the district. They were furious, as were others, that the district would declare real estate not needed, without giving it back to the original owners. Additionally, people still used the property for hiking and walking trails.

We successfully performed a lawful citizen's arrest on the entire board of commissioners for their refusal to permit public comment during a contentious open meeting. State law mandates public comment must be permitted and places criminal penalties on board members for violations. The Sheriff reviewed the video and agreed with our actions. NBC5-Chicago and Breitbart picked up this story. We hope to never do this again.

During this process, we won a lawsuit against the district in the Appellate Court for their violation of the Open Meetings Act, when they called a meeting to approve lease rates, covenants, and other items without properly informing the public of what they were voting on.

One commissioner voted to pay for advertising which resulted in the painting of his private business building in Marshall, Illinois, and the district voted to investigate and pursue action against a FOIA requester because they didn't like what she wrote about them.

The Attorney General confirmed the district's ethics commission violated state law by conducting its hearings in private. A park commissioner even appointed himself to the ethics commission, to hear a complaint lodged against him. Additionally, a local reporter, who rents a building from a commissioner, was also appointed to the ethics commission.

At their final meeting, prior to a new board taking over, the board of commissioners voted to lease the real estate. Immediately following that vote, a new board was sworn in office, they reconsidered the previous vote, and voted to not lease out the real estate. They also voted to terminate all discussions of a subdivision. The property in question is still being used for riding and hiking trails, as was initially intended.

[Naperville Park District](#)

This Park District adopted an ordinance gifting items to park commissioners and their family members. Some of these include discount on golf, free golf, discounts on cart rental and merchandise, free beach admission, free league participation, free paddle boats and gym, free fitness memberships, and discounted (50% off) park and facilities rentals. We wrote about this in 2015 and in 2021, with the district making excuses as to why these gifts should not be considered compensation. The public took notice and replaced one board member at the last election.

[Carlinville Park District](#)

One board chairman resignation. Policy changed. After one request for public records was denied by the district, we resubmitted it with a whole host of records requested – but stated they could disregard those requests if they simply answered a question on whether district commissioners received any free or reduced-price services and merchandise. The district attorney called us, and we agreed they would immediately stop their unauthorized compensation to commissioners and amend district policy to reflect the change.

Channahon, Kankakee Valley, Effingham, and Arthur Park Districts

Policies changed. After our report on these districts' gifting of goods and services to park commissioners, they immediately amended their policies and stripped all gifts, and discounts from commissioners. A welcome change in how park districts should operate.

Joliet, Lisle, Hoffman Estates, Cary, South Barrington, Gurnee, Crystal Lake, and Princeton Park Districts

These districts are among those park districts who refuse to change their policies and continue gifting goods and services to their commissioners. We suspect these districts will be the catalyst for a legislative amendment to the park district code.

Public Health Departments

Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department

DISSOLVED. Twenty-four resignations or terminations. Director terminated. CFO resigned. Board members resign. Home Health department dissolved after we exposed more than \$1 million loss in the past year. Every board member and supervisory employee terminated. Gross incompetence, and millions in federal flood grant fraud were the reasons behind the dissolution of this health department. Each county now has their own separate health department to continue servicing their residents.

Effingham Public Health Department

Director resigned in lieu of termination after we exposed her purchases of alcohol using the public credit card, and her lying to the board of directors about never receiving a pay raise.

Fire Protection Districts

Rochester Fire Protection District

Three ousters. Two trustees resigned; one trustee chose not to pursue reelection.

After reading local news about a Fire Protection District making a fire truck purchase without putting it out for bid, we began investigating. It did not take long before we exposed the fire chief, who also owned and operated a fire equipment company, for self-dealing with his own fire department for years. Further investigation confirmed the FPD's attorney had warned the board of trustees on three different occasions that a fire chief doing business with his own company was a felony if those sales exceed \$2K a year. Turns out he was self-dealing far beyond the limits set by law. A criminal investigation was conducted by the Illinois State Police and turned over to the Sangamon County State's Attorney who chose not to prosecute, claiming the chief "did not know" he was breaking the law.

Tri-State Fire Protection District

Three resignations. We published a report on a fire trustee living in Texas and serving as an assistant fire chief in Texas. The trustee resigned, the chief and assistant chief were both dismissed.

Paris Fire Protection District

One indictment. We exposed a fireman for his illegal use of fire district credit card to repeatedly put fuel in his personal vehicle. We obtained the receipts and security video at the service station and published

an article on the issue. The district stepped up and asked the State's Attorney to charge him with theft of government funds. Trial still ongoing.

Reversed sale of helipad. After we were informed of the sale of the district's grass helipad to the neighboring property owner, we supplied the district board chairman with the appropriate state law regarding the sale of fire district property and informed them of their improper sale. They reversed the sale and refunded the monies paid to them.

Community College Districts

Community college districts are governed by the [Public Community College Act](#).

College of DuPage ("COD")

Twenty-nine individuals either resigned, were fired, chose not to run for reelection, or were voted out of office. This included the college president, most of his senior staff, foundation board members, and college attorneys.

What began as a simple investigation into the compensation of a community college president turned into one of the largest community college scandals in the United States.

After speaking at college board meetings on matters related to the college president and the board president, we received a tip pointing to questionable contracting matters between the college and the college foundation board members.

The tip was accurate and the exposure over the next few years was overwhelming. Here is what we found:

- College issuing no-bid contracts to foundation board members.
- College issuing no-bid architect contracts to foundation board member that was not an architect
- College funds were used for the non-public purpose at the college's Water Leaf restaurant. Later audited by the IRS and forced to pay restitution.
- Illegal closed session votes awarding the president a contract extension. A criminal complaint we filed resulting in a prosecution which the school was found guilty, and the contract extension voided.
- College issuing contracts that were never signed.
- College issuing contracts for work already performed years prior.
- Criminal conviction of the college's radio engineer who invoiced his own department from a company he owned.
- Internal Auditor confirmed contracts were being issued in violation of the law, but his input was ignored.
- College president used foundation funds to buy a muzzleloader rifle as a gift to a departing employee of the college.
- Multiple federal and state grand jury subpoenas were issued shortly after we met with federal authorities to provide them our early findings.
- Meetings were held in a small room intentionally to limit the number of people who could attend. We brought a lawsuit to rectify that issue and won. The very day the judge ruled in our favor, the board of trustees meeting had over 500 people in attendance.

- Every side of the political aisle was unified against the corruption that was being exposed. Those entities included the adjunct professors, professors' union, staff, democrats, republicans, tea party, libertarians, and even nonpolitically affiliated citizens. They all spoke during meetings and demanded accountability. During one meeting 73 citizens took to the microphone, all speaking against the president and his actions except for the final speaker who tried to defend him.
- The exposure of the malfeasance lead to the college's accreditation being placed on probation. This led to a clean slate of people being elected that took action to terminate the president, changes in policy, and overall transformation as to how the college operates.

Water Districts

Clark-Edgar Rural Water District

Referendum passed to elect commissioners. Seven commissioners removed through referendum for election. Two candidates withdraw from race after petition objections filed on false signatures. Stopped unlawful annexation of municipal water supply. Board chairman chose not to run for office again after we exposed \$29 million of debt for 2500 customers. Notified state comptroller of this district's failure to file mandatory annual financial report for the past 25 years. Reports are now filed on time. Comptroller is now fining local governments for late filings and failures to file.

Fosterburg Water District

Referendum to elect board members. After we expose the district's illegal spending on a Superbowl weekend party for board members and families, including lavish catered food and alcohol, paid for by the taxpayers, residents circulated a petition to force a referendum to make the trustees elected rather than appointed. We also exposed a trustee's financial conflict of interest in vehicle maintenance for the district. This district's actions were the catalyst for an amendment to the Water District Act permitting removal of appointed board members.

South Sangamon Water Commission

Contract cancelled. After we exposed the water commission's contract with its engineer to permit his free use of commission property for personal use, the contract was canceled. Commissioner resigned after we submitted some FOIA requests for public records related to the commission.

Mass Transit Districts

Mass Transit District must comply with the [Local Mass Transit District Act](#).

East Central Illinois Mass Transit District

Two convictions, several terminations (including the CEO), one board member ousted, and the district was DISSOLVED by action of its board of directors after rampant theft of public funds, and illegal appointments to the board. The former executive director and her daughter were both charged with and convicted in federal court of theft of public funds. We documented credit card fraud, through their weekly use of the district's credit to purchase food for their households (\$28k in just one year), took lavish vacations, purchase intimate clothing attire, and others. We also documented their creation of a shell company in Indiana who was contracted to perform all the vehicle maintenance on the transit district busses. No maintenance was being performed, and the business consisted of a tiny garage with a mailbox. In total, several hundred thousand dollars was absconded from the public in this operation.

RIDES Mass Transit District

Saved Edgar County over \$154k, when RIDES-MTD annexed the county into their transit district and entered into a contract with the county to take all assets of the dissolved district. We researched state statutes and found that a dissolved district must sell all of its assets, pay all of its outstanding debts, and any remaining funds shall be deposited into the county general fund. We threatened to sue to prohibit the county from gifting those funds to RIDES-MTD. Our State's Attorney stated that he would "rather be sued by the new mass transit district than by the Edgar County Watchdogs." RIDES did sue the county, and a judge dismissed their case, leaving the left-over funds in the county general fund – just as we predicted.

Bloomington-Normal Mass Transit District

We documented, with the assistance of Diane Benjamin, at blnnews.com, the average losses of this district are in excess of \$1 million each month over the past several years. There is no ending in sight for these losses, but we are still working on it.

Townships

Illinois Townships must comply with the [Township Code](#).

Algonquin Township

Six ousters through elections. With similar issues as the Road District, the Clerk continually refused to comply with FOIA requests leading to multiple FOIA lawsuits of which several are over three years old, and they continue to refuse to produce the records requested. The ongoing exposure of malfeasance lead to multiple resignations and the entire board and clerk being replaced at the last election.

Maine Township

Three resignations. After we submitted a FOIA request for records exposing illegal spending by the township and in the general assistance fund, the director and GA administrator resigned. The attorney also resigned after we coached some board members how to pressure him into resigning.

Anderson Township

Currently working this one. This township is poor, doesn't have a building, and none of its road district equipment is stored under a roof as state law requires. Their finances were a mess, they failed to file required annual reports. They are currently working on correcting all of it and have filed their annual reports.

DuPage Township

Two resignations; supervisor and attorney. Entire board replaced at election. We exposed illegal health insurance and illegal advance pays given to the supervisor, hundred of thousands in improper expenditures of general assistance funds, illegal transfers of funds, and certain conflicts of interest. The supervisor resigned. We stopped a trustee from being appointed as supervisor by pointing out he would be committing a felony if appointed prior to his resigning from the office of trustee (which he was not willing to do).

Shipman Township

Township assessor resigned after we attended one meeting and sent one FOIA request for public records of her office.

Avon Township

Entire board and supervisor ousted at election. Avon Township had a little bit of everything wrong. The supervisor, who was also a county board member, was the driving force behind this misconduct. Among what we found:

- Purchase of real estate without board approval
- Remodel house without board approval
- Sale of real estate, to his nonprofit, without board approval
- Purchase of step van without board approval
- Transfer step van to his nonprofit without board approval
- Purchase of electric car without board approval
- Installation of charging station without board approval
- Selling electric car to himself without board approval
- Holding illegal annual town meeting of the electors
- Opened a fake website, using the township's name, to spread lies prior to the election
- Electioneering with township email account
- Evidence of forged election petitions
- Operated unlicensed food pantry with township funds

Pecatonica Township

Policy changes. Attorney ousted. Several board members and the supervisor ousted at election. This township board and supervisor were simply abusive to residents. Two residents were arrested for attempting to speak at township meetings. Both residents beat the charges in court. At least five opinions from the Attorney General stated the supervisor violated the open meeting act by unlawfully preventing members of the public from speaking, and by adopting unreasonable public comment rules.

At our suggestion, and during the 2021 annual town meeting of the electors, the electors took charge and exercised their right to manage the use of township property and to set penalties for township ordinance violations. Their leadership prohibited anyone from being kept off township property without a court order and prohibited arresting anyone for an ordinance violation. Adopted and passed by the electors, these new ordinances put a stop to the supervisor arresting people who spoke at township meetings.

Wesley Township

Supervisor resigned, two clerks resigned, assessor resigned, three board members resigned, road commissioner ousted at election.

This township had an appointed road commissioner who attempted to abandon a township road because he didn't like who was living on the road. We assisted residents to appeal this decision to the county engineer, who held a hearing, and overturned the township road commissioner's abandonment of the road.

During this process, we learned much about the township; Absolute refusal to provide public records which resulted in three lawsuits, two of which were settled, one still in the courts. Attempting to charge people to use the township park when the Township Code specifically states that township parks “*shall be forever held for the free use of the public.*” Setting a fee structure for using the park in an effort to “keep out the Blacks and Mexicans” and a township trustee illegally acting as a “Park Ranger” and badgering people while they used the park. This township also filed multiple false police reports on residents who used the park.

[Shelby Township](#)

Entire board ousted at election; supervisor resigned, appointed supervisor refused to take office. This township had been one-party control for decades, and it showed. The amount of accumulated funds was astounding, property taxes were raised annually, and they basically threw public funds at anyone willing to show up to a meeting and ask for it.

One board member was also getting paid to be the building janitor.

After the election, the supervisor was asked by a reporter what he thought of the election results. His comment: “Shocking.” He resigned a couple days later.

This township was the catalyst for an amendment to the Township Code setting a maximum accumulation of funds of certain township accounts.

[Township Road Districts](#)

Township Road Districts must comply with both the Township Code and the Highway Code. Officers consist of the elected Road Commissioner, and the township supervisor and clerk acting as the statutory road district treasurer and clerk.

[Algonquin Township Road District](#)

Local reporting reflected a total disregard for illegal spending taking place within the Algonquin Township Road District. The lack of proper reporting triggered our investigation into the self-dealings of the Algonquin Township Road Commissioner. Numerous FOIA requests were ignored by the clerk which resulted in a FOIA lawsuit against the road district.

The alleged misconduct included credit card fraud, timecard fraud, misuse of public property, and the road district attorney performing work for a private nonprofit while billing it to the road district.

Only after being sued were certain road district records provided, costing the taxpayers \$55,000 due to their failure to produce records.

[Paris Township Road District](#)

One resignation after we exposed the road district’s illegal gifting of chip-and-seal driveways for friends.

Municipalities

Illinois municipalities, both home rule and non-home rule, must comply with the [Illinois Municipal Code](#)

Albion and Albion Fire Department

Nineteen firemen resigned; Mayor resigned. We were invited to this municipality because there were allegations of conflicts of interest with the mayor also selling insurance to the village, and the contract for construction of a new firehouse was not properly approved, including an addition to the construction increasing its cost. Whenever the village board took the issue up during a meeting, the firemen would threaten to resign.

We attended one meeting, and when it appeared to us the firemen had convinced the village board to approve the illegal contract, we told them it could not be approved at that meeting because it was not on the agenda. All the firemen immediately resigned. The board immediately called an emergency meeting, accepted all of their resignations, appointed a new fire chief, and within a couple weeks had a fully functioning fire department again. The mayor resigned prior to our attendance at the meeting.

Bloomington

111 indictments, 4 convictions with \$470K restitution, one resignation, mayor chose not to seek reelection. We assisted a reporter at blnnews.com in her investigation of the city of Bloomington and its contract for the Colosseum's vending and ticketing. Through this process, she filed a *pro se*, handwritten lawsuit to obtain public records denied under FOIA. She ultimately prevailed. Once news was published about problems with the contract and possible major financial irregularities with the contractor, law enforcement stepped in and indicted the director and supervisors of the food and ticket contractor.

We reported on the mayor's improper purchasing of tickets for his girlfriend to join him on a trip to the Japanese sister-city of Bloomington. City amended its credit card use policy.

Tinley Park

Sixteen ousters; attorney terminated, seven zoning board commissioners resigned, assistant city manager resigned, alderman resigned, village planner resigned, mayor ousted at election, three aldermen ousted at election, clerk lost election.

The issue in Tinley Park centered around the fast-tracking of a text change to zoning regulations. It was alleged the village planner, in concert with zoning board members, made a simple text change to the zoning ordinance which then permitted low-income housing complex to be built in the downtown area. They changed the word "shall" to "may." Without city council approval. Residents caught the change prior to final approval and exercised their right to petition their government for redress of grievances.

Redmon

One resignation, one ouster. After we attended a meeting and informed the mayor we knew he moved out of the village and was no longer qualified to sit as mayor, he resigned. We also informed the new mayor a sitting village trustee was a convicted felon and not qualified. The mayor declared that seat vacant.

Metcalf

Two board members ousted at election and water superintendent resigned after we published several articles detailing the self-dealing of elected officials and problems with the village water system. We

were also successful in keeping a local water district from annexing the village's water system by explaining current law prohibited the annexation.

[Brocton](#)

One ouster, halted dissolution of police department. When a village trustee took a job out of state and refused to attend board meeting, we advised the mayor on the process of declaring a vacancy. The mayor ousted him through declaration of vacancy. We also assisted resident who petitioned for a referendum to keep the police department, which won the election by one vote. We attended several meetings and wrote several articles on the importance of referenda and complying with voter wishes no matter how small the margin of victory was. The police department remained.

[Lerna](#)

Seven resignations. Three trustees resigned after we submitted a FOIA request for expenditures of the village. The mayor resigned after we exposed his illegal employment as village maintenance supervisor while also being mayor. Village attorney resigned after agreeing with us on the mayor's working as an employee and the mayor ignoring her advice. Two village clerks resigned after we exposed their part-time work with the village was violative of state statutes.

[Assumption](#)

Four resignations. City treasurer resigned after we asked for public records she had been refusing to give to village officials, an alderman resigned, and the mayor resigned over disagreements with the majority board members. The city attorney resigned after the mayor, stating he was not familiar with municipal law – this was after we pointed out various opinions, which he had made, violated municipal law.

[Clarendon Hills](#)

One resignation, one withdrawal from election. We attended one Clarendon Hill board meeting and informed the city of the municipal code's prohibition of serving as an alderman if they were in arrears of any debt to the municipality during their term of office. We also informed them of the same prohibition if they were in arrears of a debt to the municipality at the time they filed nomination papers for election. Both debts were late water bill payments to the city, which resulted in late fees being applied. Both resigned immediately after the meeting.

[Naperville](#)

One termination, two aldermen not reelected after we exposed their routine late payments to the city for water bills, which resulted in late fees being applied. We spoke at their meeting and explained the municipal code's prohibition of being in arrears of a debt to the municipality during their terms of office. They publicly objected until we produced their water bills during the meeting. This was the catalyst for the legislature to change the municipal code, making it almost impossible to oust a municipal official for being in arrears of a debt to a municipality.

Naperville Police Chief fired the police department's FOIA Officer after we produced evidence that she had lied to us on our request for public records. In her response, she had redacted certain information in a way that was not permanent, after we noticed the redactions were improper, we posed several questions to her, and she lied about what was redacted. After reading our article, reviewing the evidence, and interviewing us in the Naperville Police Department, the chief terminated the employee.

North Henderson

Two resignations. One village trustee resigned after we pointed out his disqualification to serve based on arrearage of a debt to the municipality (water bills), and the village attorney resigned after we sent him a letter asking for clarification on decisions of the village council.

LaHarp

One conviction, one termination. We investigated a tip concerning the mayor of LaHarp using the city backhoe to dig holes and replace water and sewer lines at his private residence. After publishing an article which included photographs and attending a meeting where the mayor tendered a check to the city for using the backhoe, he resigned. Additionally, the State's Attorney charged him with Official Misconduct and the mayor later plead guilty to a reduced charge.

Gilman

One resignation. Village clerk resigned days after we exposed their auditor's investigation of possible embezzlement within her office. We also exposed the mayor's real estate taxes not reflecting a new home constructed on his property for several years after its construction.

Bradley

One termination. Bradley Village Administrator was terminated after we exposed her anti-gay comments about a village employee, and the two petitions of orders of protection against her in Indiana and Illinois. Months later, the mayor hired her again as a consultant to the village.

LaSalle

Two resignations. A LaSalle police officer resigned after we obtained copies of police reports indicating he had frequented prostitutes. A city council member resigned after exposure of his conflict of interest.

Mt. Pulaski

Two resignations. The mayor resigned after we received tips of wrongdoing, verified the tips, and published an article on his alleged wrongdoing. He resigned, while stating on his resignation that it was effective immediately under the understanding the village would not pursue criminal charges against him. The village attorney also resigned after we pointed out the mayor's resignation could not include any agreement to not pursue criminal charges.

Atlanta (IL)

One resignation, two removed from ballot. The Mayor of Atlanta, Illinois resigned after we wrote about the process used in the city's purchase of the golf course and the location of city official's homes in relation to the golf course. Later, two city aldermen were removed from the ballot after we pointed out they had not filed the proper paperwork with the county clerk.

Carlinville

One resignation, one termination. An alderwoman resigned from office and the city's attorney was terminated after allegations he lied to a judge during our open records lawsuit against the city. The city paid our attorneys \$90k to settle the lawsuit.

Additionally, the city had entered into a contract and formed a private company with another municipality and a private water company. We alleged in several articles that the city lacked any

statutory authority to enter into such an agreement. A couple of residents filed suit and won a circuit court decision against the city. The city appealed and the appellate court overturned the lower court. The residents appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court, who declined to hear the case, which kept the appellate court decision intact.

[Hammon](#)

Two resignations. A village trustee and the village mayor resigned after we exposed their failure to bid projects and handing insider contracts to friends without bids.

[Chatham](#)

One trustee resigned, attorney resigned, mayor did not run for reelection. After our extensive work exposing various issues with the village's contract with the water commission, ethics complaints, and other water issues, a trustee and the mayor resigned. A written complaint to the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission prompted the village attorney to resign.

[Strausburg](#)

One resignation. Mayor resigned after we submitted FOIA requests on water related issues.

[Catlin](#)

One resignation of a cemetery board member after he refused to comply with the Freedom of Information Act after we requested certain public records.

[South Jacksonville](#)

Two resignations. After we coached, trained, and assisted a local watchdog group, they exposed malfeasance in their city, which resulted in the mayor and city treasurer resigning from office.

[Poplar Grove](#)

Mayor ousted at election. After we wrote about the mayor's past, including his troubles with the law, and with insurance licensing regulators in three states, he was ousted at the election.

One resignation and five election failures. The mayor's problems became his election slate's problems. Working with a local reporter, we helped expose the Rescue Squad's questionable financial activities which led to the resignation of a board member after one FOIA request, and the Fire Protection District where the residents had approved a referendum to force the trustee to be elected rather than appointed. Every candidate on the mayor's slate lost that election.

[Marshall](#)

Alderwoman ousted. After we researched the residency of an elected alderwoman, we reported that she had never lived in the city, the entire board and mayor knew about it, and the county clerk issued her voter registration to a business address instead of her residency address. We alleged voter fraud and an alderman took steps to file a lawsuit to oust her from office. She resigned prior to the lawsuit being filed.

Marshall was also one of the catalysts for a change to the open meetings act for refusing to provide an alderman with records of the public body he was seeking to review prior to voting on issues. We also assisted aldermen and resident to convince the city not to purchase a (former) superfund site, which

would have required annual maintenance and inspections, and place the city in potential financial hardship.

[Wheeling](#)

Mayor ousted at election after we featured his misuse of city police vehicles for personal business use and prevailing in a FOIA lawsuit against the city for security camera footage.

[Calumet City](#)

This is an ongoing investigation for us. Currently three employees have resigned, library director terminated, library board dissolved and reconstituted, and the mayor has obtained a restraining order against the clerk prohibiting her or any other city employee from destroying records. A forensic audit is being conducted, and several state and federal law enforcement complaints have been filed.

[West Point](#)

Four resignations. A local citizen began asking questions about self-dealing going on within the village. After not getting any answers, the citizen contacted us for assistance and in a matter of a few months, the citizen was able to expose the self-dealing going on with the board members and family members. During the election, the citizen's husband ran for office, and shortly after being sworn in and asking questions as a new board member, four board members resigned as they knew their actions were simply wrong. This was another example of a single citizen reaching out for guidance and following the model established to expose corrupt officials in their local government.

Counties

[Edgar County](#)

Edgar County is where the ECWd got its start. Thirty-three resignations, firings, election losses. Two indictments. This county had major problems with its county airport, its 911 board, its sheriff department, and almost everything else imaginable. See other sections for explanations.

County board chairman resigned due to conflict of interest after we were successful in stopping millions of dollars of state and federal transportation funds coming into the county. He signed an agreement not to participate in county engineer discussions, but we filmed him violating that agreement. We sued him in state court for violating our right to vote and have that vote count. He resigned shortly after IDOT cancelled all incoming funds.

We also reported on a former sheriff's illegal sales of confiscated firearms, some with serial numbers filed off, to his own deputies.

[DuPage County](#)

Exposed illegal compensation given to county board members and the State's Attorney. Exposed illegal conflict of interest in a county board member also being appointed to other compensated positions. This county, like a few others we have found, were permitting elected county officials to participate in expensive health insurance plans when the adopted compensation package did not include any types of health insurance. The board eventually changed future compensation setting ordinances to include the health insurance.

Ford County

Supervisor of Assessments resigned after we exposed her malfeasance and defective publication of real estate taxes due.

County board chairman resigned after our exposure of the bi-county health department (see county health department section for details)

Hancock County

One conviction, two resignations. EMS director indicted and convicted of official misconduct and theft. County board member resigned over allegations of bid rigging and contracts to himself. Sheriff removed from 911 board after we proved he could not legally be a member of that board.

We sued the Hancock County Sheriff for failing to comply with the FOIA, and the court forced him to provide our requested records related to his office's illegal gun sales.

Crawford County

We had to sue the Crawford County Sheriff to obtain public records related to illegal sales of confiscated firearms by the department.

Iroquois County

Eighteen resignations or terminations. This dealt primarily with the 911 board and the joint ICOM (911) board between the county and a municipality. We exposed how the ICOM board was improperly established, how the 911 attorney could not be contracted, and how the 911 director's contract violated state law. The director resigned, her contract dissolved, the attorney resigned, the entire ICOM board dissolved, seven 911 board members removed from office, two board members not reappointed.

LaSalle County

Seventeen indictments. State's Attorney voted out of office after our multi-series publication of his improper spending, illegally establishing his own police department, electioneering, and more. After the elections, the former State's Attorney was indicted on seventeen charges, but they were all dropped later because of the state's failure to provide for a speedy trial.

Coles County

Improper hiring of a contracted county assessor. Illegal sales of confiscated guns by the sheriff, and illegal gun repair performed by the sheriff in his private business capacity.

Shelby County

Still ongoing. State's Attorney withdrew from the election, board chairman ousted at election, county engineer resigned. An ongoing forensic audit has identified at least \$4.5 million dollars in payroll fraud within the sheriff's office, according to the auditor's interim report. Improper hiring of private attorney by the State's Attorney's office, this circuit court ruled in the county's favor, the case was appealed and is awaiting a court date. County engineer had abused the system and conducted private business out of the county building for years.

Two Treasurer's office employees resign after destruction of public records and a FOIA request we submitted asking for copies of timecards.

Supervisor of assessments and the chief deputy assessor both resign from their elected township supervisor positions after we pointed out the statutory conflicts of interest.

[Madison County](#)

Policy change on their public comment policy for public meetings. The Attorney General issued an opinion that their established policy violated the open meetings act after our complaint that they refused to permit us to speak without a 53-hour advanced notice.

[St. Clair County](#)

Electoral Board meeting canceled after we pointed out to the board, they had not complied with the open meetings act's requirement of posting the agenda at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

[Stark County](#)

Three resignations. Meeting shut down by Sheriff. We received a tip that this county board was holding illegal meetings, so we attended one. What we found was the board's complete disregard for complying with the Counties Code's requirements on special meetings of the board. We notified the State's Attorney and the Sheriff. During the meeting we asked the Sheriff to enforce the rule of law. The deputies and municipal police halted the meeting and escorted all board members out of the meeting room where more than 200 residents had assembled to protest the meeting. The chairman and two board members resigned within days.

[County Probation Offices](#)

Coles County: One termination. Our reporting on a probation officer who allegedly got drunk and started repeatedly shouting the "N-word" at bar patrons, and even threatening them by telling them they should go home because this was a "sundown town" caused the county probation officer supervisor to immediately terminate offender's employment. We published the police reports and notified local television media, who also ran the story.

DeWitt County: Our reporting brought to light the fact that a probation officer was using the public credit card as his personal account each and every month. The probation office, the judges, and the state's attorney all attempted to cover up this misuse of public credit. We exposed all of it. The department now has more stringent policies on credit card use. They "fixed" what we exposed, by preventing county board members from viewing the monthly credit card bills, which led to a Bill being introduced to place those expenditures under the Freedom of Information Act. The lobbying arm of the probation officers got the Bill stalled.

[County and Municipal Airports](#)

[Edgar County:](#)

One resignation, one conviction. County airport board member resigned and pled guilty to voter fraud in Indiana. A resident of a county in Illinois was appointed to the county airport board and was also hired as Director of Public Relations of an Indiana county-level Emergency Management Agency. One requirement of his employment was to be a resident of that county. He set up a false mailing address and registered to vote (and voted) in Indiana when he was actually a resident of Illinois. Through our investigations, we contacted an Indiana prosecutor, and he prosecuted the voter fraud case. He resigned from the airport board when we questioned him on his alleged residency.

5-member airport board DISSOLVED by the county. Later reconstituted with new board members after several years of conflicts of interest, alleged theft of funds, personal vindictiveness against the public and pilots, regular open meetings and open records violations, and several lawsuits and complaints to the state attorney general.

Two resignations of airport managers. One resigned after we exposed his misdeeds dealing with contracts, loans, telephone service, federal civil rights issues, and FOIA violations. His hand-picked replacement resigned after we obtained and exposed proof of his lying on the employment application about his previous experience and licensures.

[Benton Municipal Airport](#)

One resignation, two board member removals, entire airport board disbanded. We coached and assisted a local watchdog group on what to look for when looking at airports. A board member resigned after their first FOIA request, and two board members were replaced by the city council. After notifying the mayor of all the improper activities taking place, the entire airport board was disbanded two years after we told them it was an illegal board, and after the Attorney General published an opinion confirming it to be improper. The board was later properly reconstituted with new board members who chose to operate according to state laws.

[County Hospital Districts](#)

[Franklin County Hospital District](#)

CEO terminated, board members no longer feeding themselves at expense of taxpayers. After we exposed, with the assistance of a local watchdog group, the improprieties of the hospital CEO, he was terminated. Hospital District Trustees are supposed to work without compensation. When we were informed of how the board would cater food to the meetings, and eat in front of the attending public, we instructed a couple of residents to show up, grab a plate, eat the food, and see what the board's response was. They did, and the board said nothing, except there was never any food at subsequent meetings. On a side note, the board did finally publish a new policy prohibiting patients and visitors from bringing farm animals, specifically pigs and goats, into the hospital to visit with patients.

[Jersey County \[Public\] Community Hospital](#)

This is a hospital district in Jersey County. When we informed the hospital director that this hospital was prohibited from donating campaign funds to candidates, he obtained a refund from one state Senator, and paid out of his pocket for the other state Senator who had previously received campaign donations from this public hospital district.

[Illinois State Agencies](#)

[Illinois Auditor General](#)

We exposed the Illinois Auditor General, Frank Mautino, for using campaign funds for non-campaign expenditures to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Within weeks of our first article, Mautino's public relations representative confirmed he was cooperating with the US Attorney's Office who had opened a criminal investigation into his actions.

While attempting to defend his actions during the State Board of Elections hearings, Mautino invoked his 5th amendment rights to remain silent. His attempts of fighting off the complaint failed after 4 years

of court action which resulted in the Illinois Supreme Court confirming he violated campaign expenditure laws. They could not address the secondary complaint regarding the use of funds for personal matters because he refused to turn over the documents even though the campaign was subpoenaed for them.

The Illinois House of Representatives has had a resolution filed to remove Mautino from office for his actions each year since being exposed, but to this day the democrat-controlled house refuses to allow a vote on the resolution.

As it stands, a corrupted Auditor General in Illinois still holds office and will be able to retire with a substantial taxpayer-funded pension all while having violated the laws of Illinois which was confirmed by the State's Supreme Court.

Senate

One resignation, one indictment. One Senator resigned within a couple weeks of our exposure that he lied about receiving a DUI. Prior to his resignation, he was successful in getting the court document sealed, and attempted to keep us from publishing them. It didn't work because we obtained copies prior to the court sealing them. Another Senator was indicted and charged in federal court for campaign fraud after we published documents about illegal contributions to his campaign from a local government. Although he was not charged for receiving funds, we cannot help but consider some of our work as a catalyst for the federal investigation.

House

One resignation, suspension of campaign, withdrawal from race, and resignations from two other government jobs. An Illinois State Representative resigned from office a mere 21 days after we began our investigation of his activities as a state officer, school district superintendent, and adjunct professor at a state university (teaching school board ethics).

Three candidates not elected. One lost the election after we exposed his failure to report child sexual abuse while he was a school superintendent, and how the failure was in reporting the very person he stood up in his wedding as Best Man. One candidate lost the election after we exposed his three DUIs and charges of spouse abuse – all working their way through the courts during the election. One candidate lost the election after we exposed his illegal sale of guns and his counseling for sexual harassment while he was a sheriff and deputy.

One candidate withdrew from the race after we exposed his multiple DUIs, arrests, and an Order of Protection against him.

Prisoner Review Board

One termination by Governor Rauner. We were given information related to an appointed member of the Illinois Prisoner Review Board.

- During our investigation, we found the board member, in his former occupation as a deputy sheriff, had been counseled on his use of racial slurs, more than once.
- We also found he filed a false Statement of Economic Interest form with the Secretary of State.
- Additionally, we obtained security camera footage from inside a county clerk's office, and inside and outside the courthouse, along with election petition sheets, which proved the board

member had used a state vehicle, on state time, to electioneer by traveling to the clerk's office and filing his election nomination papers.

- Governor Rauner terminated his employment by removing him from the IPRB. In the termination letter, Rauner stated: *"Your use of a racial slur, paired with the other two allegations leveled against you, have led us to determine that you have shown an inability to serve on the board."*

We are currently investigating the alleged repeated appointments, removals, and reappointments being made to this board by Governor Pritzker, in his effort to skirt the senate confirmation process.

[Attorney General's Procurement Policy and Compliance Board](#)

After learning of the Illinois Attorney General's entire computer network getting hacked and held for ransom, we decided to try and find out the price tag taxpayers were paying to fix their problem. We ran into a roadblock concerning public records and meetings.

- We sued the Attorney General for Open Meetings violations; this board held open meetings but redacted the meeting minutes and refused to provide the audio recording without redactions. After filing suit, the AG's office has provided the meeting minutes and recordings. They will pay our attorney fees.
- We also sued under the Freedom of Information Act for those records, and for contracts entered into by the board. The AG produced those records to us.

[Illinois Arts Council Agency](#)

Sued the Arts Council Agency for failure to provide public records related to financial reimbursements to board members. Additionally, we wrote about the council's use of public funds, as an example, the council was paying a grandmother a \$3K "Master Artist's Fee" to teach her own granddaughter to play Carnatic music on a Veena instrument.

[Health and Family Services](#)

One termination, one resignation. HFS investigator terminated after we were given a tip, verified it, and pushed an article stating the investigator had taken vacation to serve time in jail in Missouri, and lied on his application for promotion about having ever been convicted. An HFS supervisor resigned after our exposure of rampant failures of the IMPACT system within the HFS.

[Department of Public Health](#)

During our investigation into the largest NO BID contract in the state of Illinois who outsourced its Medicare/Medicaid billing to the state of Michigan, we sued them for failing to provide records we knew they had in their possession. That case was brought pro-se and we won in a four-hour trial held in Edgar County. IDPH was required to produce the non-exempt records and pay all associated costs.

[Department of Transportation](#)

Two terminations. Two IDOT employees were termination after we submitted FOIA requests questioning their hiring without proper qualifications and licensure.

[Department of Corrections](#)

Resignation of the Executive Director of Heartland Human Services - Illinois Department of Corrections. Acting on a tip, we looked at a mayor, who was also an employee of the HHS-IDOC. We published a

report, including photographs, on his improper use of a state vehicle for non-state business. We compared his working at the city and conducting city business with his timecards at IDOC, which showed what we alleged. The IDOC Inspector General conducted an investigation, and the employee resigned.

State Universities

Northern Illinois University

President ousted, one resignation. **Northern Illinois University** had a host of problems, which concluded with an Illinois Executive Inspector General investigation and final report supporting most of our findings, and NIU was also slammed by the state Auditor General for its Freedom of Information Act and records retention noncompliance. Total disregard for establishing hiring practices, disregard for travel expense reimbursements. Consultant with multiple sexual harassment complaints against him, permitted to live in student dormitory without paying rent and without it reported as compensation. Coached local resident who filed an open meetings lawsuit for a meeting where the president was gifted an unusually large severance package – the court agreed and nullified the severance package. NIU was the catalyst for legislative amendment prohibiting paying attorney fees for employees who are found guilty of crimes against the university.

Southern Illinois University

After we notified them, **Southern Illinois University** immediately obtained a refund for a donation to a local political action committee. In a routine search for public body donations to PACs and candidates, we notified SIU of our finding, and they corrected the problem by obtaining a refund and sending us a copy of the refund check.

Illinois Supreme Court

Granted a Joint Amicus Brief to the Illinois Supreme Court on a change to the Freedom of Information Act, where the state was arguing the change was retroactive. Our position was that it was not retroactive, and if the legislature had intended it to be, they would have included such a provision in the amendment. Our position prevailed; the Supreme Court ruled it was not retroactive.

Legislative Action

As we researched and wrote on problems in local government, members of the Illinois legislature took notice and changed laws, based in part on our reporting. Some changes we agreed with, while others were designed to take wrongdoing and make it right.

We have testified in several state legislative hearings on good government Bills.

The below legislative changes were either suggested by us, or as a result of our researching local governments.

- Changed Public Officer Prohibited Activities Act to authorize a county board member to also serve as a County Public Guardian and County Public Administrator. This came after our complaints and publication of felony violations of the Act by a county board member serving in those prohibited positions.
- Amended the Township Code to place restriction on a maximum accumulation of funds by a township. Our research indicated some townships were holding massive amounts of tax funds in various accounts. Sometimes more than they would spend in decades, but they continued

raising those same taxes every year. This Bill put a stop to it, and at least one township refunded the excess funds back to the taxpayers.

- Enacted the Local Government Travel Expense Control Act, which put some prohibitions and limits on the use of public funds for travel expenses. Set maximum allowable travel reimbursement and a minimum standard of documentation required.
- Amended the Open Meetings Act to mandate access of all closed session meeting minutes and closed session meeting records to every board member of the public body, whether they were in office at the time of the meeting, or newly elected or appointed to the office.
- Amended the Community College Act to prohibit excessive severance payments to employees of a community college. This came after our reporting on the College of DuPage, and their \$750k+ severance package to the former college president.
- Amended the Open Meetings Act to extend the time for a person to file a lawsuit for violations of the act.
- Amended the TORT Immunity Act to prevent payment of attorney fees and fines for state and local employees and officials who are defendants or target of an investigation, or who either plead guilty, no contest, are found guilty, or enter into a plea agreement related to crimes committed while in the performance of the duties or against the public body. This includes a prohibition on providing them with representation if they are criminal defendants or targets of a criminal investigation related to their duties. This amended was the results of our research at Northern Illinois University.
- Amended Township Code on appointments to the vacancy of township supervisor. We identified several recent situations where a township supervisor would resign. Being the only person in a township authorized to sign checks, it created an immediate hardship on township employees. This amendment requires a trustee be temporarily appointed, for the purpose of paying bills.
- Amended the Illinois Municipal Code. After our successful complaints on three separate municipalities, Naperville aldermen petitioned their state representatives to amend the Code making it next to impossible to oust an elected municipal officer for being in arrears of a debt to the municipality.
- Created the Local Volunteer Board Member Removal Act. This Act permits local governments to remove appointed board members of local volunteer boards and committees under certain conditions.
- Amended the Water District Act to permit the removal of an appointed water district trustee under certain conditions. Prior to this, there was no removal procedure.
- Amended the Pension Code, to prohibit certain nongovernmental institutions from participating in the state pension program.
- Amended the Emergency Telephone System Act to permit removal of ETSB board members under certain conditions. Previously, there was no removal process short of conviction.
- Amended the Water District Act to permit termination of the Executive Director with a simple majority vote, instead of the previous unanimous vote of the board.
- Amended the TORT Immunity Act to prohibit providing an legal representation for, or paying legal bills for public employees charged with or convicted of a crime in their official capacity of employee of a unit of government.

- Amended the Open Meetings Act to require a public body provide access to closed session recordings and minutes to all of its elected officials, even if they were not in office at the time the meeting took place.
- Amended the Board of Higher Education Act to require training for university board members.
- Amended the Public Community College Act to prohibit employment contract extensions prior to or between an election and when the newly elected board takes office – no lame-duck employment contracts.
- Amended the Public Community College Act to mandate a periodic review of all applicable laws and ordinances regarding employment contracts.
- Amended the Public Community College Act to mandate training for all elected or appointed trustees of a community college board of trustees.
- Enacted the Local Government Electronic Notification Act to permit local governments, on an opt-in basis, to communicate with taxpayers electronically, instead of the current paper mail requirements.
- Amended the Property Tax Code to permit county residents to petition for a referendum to change from elected to appointed supervisor of assessments, or from appointed to elected supervisor of assessments.
- Amended the Township Code to prohibit township officers from also being employed by the township. This amendment was a direct result of our findings in Shelby Township.

Indiana

Elwood, Indiana

One termination. Less than four hours after we notified the Elwood, Indiana, Mayor, of the city fire chief's repeated inappropriate use of the fire department's vehicle to remodel an apartment in Illinois, the mayor terminated him from his position as fire chief. Several Indianapolis news stations and newspapers picked up this story, as did WAND in Illinois.

Vigo County

One conviction. The director of public relations for the Vigo County Emergency Management Agency pled guilty to voter fraud after our investigation into his residency, based on his appointment to an airport advisory board in Illinois. Upon learning of his Illinois residency, and of his Vigo County job requiring Indiana residency, we looked at his voting records in Indiana. Voting records indicate he registered to vote in Indiana, voted in Indiana, and listed a fake address as his place of residency in Indiana. We presented the material to the county prosecutor, who charged him with voter fraud, and he ended up pleading guilty.

Oregon

One lost election. Oregon Labor Commissioner lost his election after we shared proof of his campaigning during business hours. An article published in Forbes, by Open the Books, was used by his opponent and determined to be the critical turning point in that election.

Florida

Assisted residents to objectively investigate the hiring of a school superintendent, the process used in the hiring, alleged conflicts of interest, public records related to the issue, and speaking at school board meetings. Interested citizens decided to take up the cause, after due diligence, and filed a lawsuit against the school board. It is still pending a resolution in the courts.

Employee of defense contractor terminated after we exposed her false statements made under penalty of perjury to a Florida state court impugning the actions and integrity of her employer and misrepresenting her employment position within that organization.

Higher Learning Commission

The [Higher Learning Commission](#) is regional accreditor of institutions of higher education. It accredits post-secondary educational institutions in the central United States.

One resignation. During our multi-year investigation of corruption at the College of DuPage, the HLC placed the college on probationary review. After the COD President was terminated, the HLC was scheduled to conduct an evaluation on the college to determine if it was making progress on the shortcomings which resulted in the probationary review status. The HLC published the names of the evaluators, and while researching them, we noticed one of them had similar problems in his job as a college president in Wisconsin, that the (former) COD president had. We published our findings and the HLC canceled their evaluation. That evaluator resigned from the HLC.

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

One retraction of policy memorandum.

During our investigation of the Edgar County Housing Authority, we noticed the authority was paying its directors and attorney to attend annual conferences of a Housing Authority Association. These conferences were generally in Florida and during the winter months.

We objected to their attendance based on the Illinois Housing Authority Act's prohibition of these activities in the housing authorities in counties with a population fewer than 25K.

The director contacted the Chicago HUD office, who wrote him a letter stating that since the local housing authority received some of its funding from the federal government, it was authorized to attend conferences.

We emailed the HUD employee who provided the letter, advised her of the Illinois state law prohibition, and that federal contracts generally require compliance with state laws.

HUD issued a second letter retracting its first letter, citing the Illinois prohibition.

Other Interesting Items

We submitted one of the four finalists in the 2021 Investigative Reporters and Editors' Golden Padlock Award denoting the most secretive government in the United States.

Co-recipients of the State Policy Network's 2016 Vernon S. Kriebel Foundation Unsung Hero Award.

Co-recipients of the Illinois Conservative Union's 2021 Unsung Hero Award.

Quashed three subpoenas for our reporting records. Two of them from the same township who attempted to gain access to our entire Dropbox account, another from the Effingham County State's Attorney.

Developed an online database of government vehicles, www.govplates.com, so people could look up a license plate number and know which local government the vehicle was registered to. Currently it has data from Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.

Bios of Kirk Allen and John Kraft

Kirk Allen



Co-Founder of the Edgar County Watchdogs. Married for 31 years with 1 son. Having spent a career in the Air Force he moved back to the family farm and operates a private business specializing in the fire industry and teaches tactical fireground operations at the national level. Currently serves as the Fire Chief/EMT with the Kansas Fire Protection District. In addition, he served eight years as Township Supervisor and two as a Township Trustee. Co-recipient of the 2016 State Policy Network's Vernon Kriebel Foundation Unsung Hero Award and Co-recipient of the 2021 Illinois Conservative Union's Unsung Hero award.

John Kraft



Co-Founder of the Edgar County Watchdogs. Married for 33 years with 2 daughters, 1 son, and several grandchildren. He was born in Lincoln, grew up in Olney, spent a career in the Army, and moved back to Paris, Illinois. Earned his bachelor's degree at Eastern Illinois University and has completed all coursework requirements for the Master of Public Administration at EIU. Co-recipient of the 2016 State Policy Network's Vernon Kriebel Foundation Unsung Hero Award and Co-recipient of the 2021 Illinois Conservative Union's Unsung Hero award.

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