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## **WashCOG to recognize advocates, journalists at Sunshine Breakfast**

The Washington Coalition for Open Government will celebrate open government advocates and journalists at its annual Sunshine Breakfast on March 15. The fundraising event at T-Mobile Park in Seattle is sold out but will be covered by state public affairs network TVW.

The coalition will discuss its new special report, “Your Right to Know,” and present printed copies to attendees. The report is also available online at [washcog.org](http://washcog.org).

WashCOG will honor Seattle attorney **Michele Earl-Hubbard** with the Toby Nixon Award for her long-term commitment to the cause of open government. Earl-Hubbard helped launch WashCOG in 2002 and went on to hold leadership positions with the nonprofit. She has long represented media clients and requesters seeking public records.

Recent winners of the Nixon Award include state public affairs network **TVW**, WashCOG President Emeritus **Toby Nixon** and **David Cuillier**, currently director of the Joseph L. Brechner Freedom of Information Project at the University of Florida.

The coalition’s James Andersen Award goes to Tacoma attorney **Joan Mell** for extraordinary work on behalf of WashCOG. Mell represented the coalition in its successful lawsuit against the Washington state Redistricting Commission for violating the state Open Public Meetings Act. She is also WashCOG’s attorney in its lawsuit against the state Legislature for claiming a “legislative privilege” to withhold records from the public.

For its Kenneth F. Bunting Award, WashCOG is jointly recognizing state government reporters **Shauna Sowersby** of McClatchy and **Joseph O’Sullivan** of Crosscut for their collaborative and comprehensive reporting on the state Legislature’s latest move to hide its work from the public

with “legislative privilege.” Sowersby and O’Sullivan published more than two dozen stories on Statehouse transparency – stories that alerted the public to lawmakers’ secrecy maneuvers.

Previous Bunting Award winners include **Crosscut**, **The Seattle Times**, as well as **Chris Ingalls** and the **KING 5** investigations team.

At this year’s Sunshine Breakfast the coalition will unveil a new award to recognize the work of journalists at The Seattle Times. WashCOG will present the Jim and Birte Falconer Shine the Light Award to **Sydney Brownstone** and **Taylor Blatchford** for their deeply reported, heartfelt and haunting stories about the lost patients of the former Northern State Hospital outside of Sedro-Woolley. The award recognizes individuals, organizations or agencies whose work makes an outstanding, sustained contribution to public understanding and support of the state Public Records Act. The award is named in recognition of longtime Seattle residents **Jim and Birte Falconer**, whose generous support of WashCOG has had a transformative effect on the coalition.

Throughout the year WashCOG presents Key Awards to people and organizations who have done something notable for the cause of open government in recent months. At the Sunshine Breakfast the coalition will give Key Awards to:

- **Stacy Dym**, executive director of The Arc of Washington, and **Tim Gerlitz**, superintendent of Lakeland Village, a state facility for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Dym and Gerlitz worked to preserve records at Lakeland Village, which was established in 1914.
- University of Washington student **Jake Harper**, who used public records to help students get into UW’s most competitive academic programs.
- **Melissa Luck**, executive news director at KXLY TV in Spokane, for her advocacy and use of the Public Records Act. She is a member of the state Sunshine Committee.
- KUOW public radio journalists **Isolde Raftery** and **Ashley Hiruko**, who were recognized with Key Awards in 2022 – a pandemic year – but were never presented with their certificates.

The Washington Coalition for Open Government is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded in 2002. We are an independent, broad-based advocate for public records, open meetings and informed citizens.

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