

## SAN FRANCISCANS FOR SUNSHINE

782 Bay Street  
San Francisco, CA 94109

October 2, 2025

Commission Streamlining Task Force (CSTF)  
City Hall, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: [Sunshine Ordinance Task Force](#) (SOTF): compelling reasons to retain it

Dear Commission Streamlining Task Force Members:

San Franciscans for Sunshine (SF4S), and the persons and organizations listed below as co-signatories strongly urge that you recommend retaining the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force as a stand-alone body. SF4S is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization of citizens who hold that government transparency is a pillar of democracy. Our Steering Committee comprises current and former members of the SOTF. Please consider:

**1. The SOTF operates on a minuscule budget.** Its eleven voting members receive no pay or expense reimbursement for their SOTF-related work. Members may enroll in health insurance offered to City employees, which costs the City about \$300 per member per year. The SOTF does not have its own paid staff; legal and administrative functions are performed by a deputy city attorney and a clerk who is assigned by the clerk of the Board of Supervisors, respectively.

**2. The SOTF saves the City money.** In a 2011-2012 study requested by then-Supervisor Scott Wiener, the Budget and Legislative Analyst estimated that the total cost for City agencies to comply with local and state sunshine laws amounted to less than 0.7% of the City's General Fund budget. And the analyst pointed out that it is difficult to gauge how much the SOTF saves the City in legal expenses by obviating the need for members of the public to take sunshine scofflaws to court.

But this anecdote might offer a clue: In 2016, the State Superior Court ordered the City Ethics Commission to provide requested documents that administrative aides had for no reason withheld from local resident Allen Grossman, and to reimburse his legal expense of \$24,000. Multiply that amount by the 100 to 150 complaints that citizens file with the SOTF each year; if the SOTF – the people's sunshine court – did not exist, sunshine-related lawsuits could cost the City upward of \$3.5 million a year.

**3. The SOTF is a model of efficiency,** notwithstanding claims to the contrary by its anti-sunshine critics. SOTF meetings, which normally start at 4 p.m., often last late into the evening. Meeting lengths vary with the number of cases before it each month, the level of legal complexity of those cases and the number of people making public comment. In addition, legal analysis provided to the SOTF has at times been minimal, creating extra work for SOTF members.

**4. The SOTF is law-born,** established in Article IV, Section 30, of the [Sunshine Ordinance](#) (Administrative Code Chapter 67), which the Board of Supervisors unanimously passed and Mayor

Frank Jordan signed in 1993, and citizens voted, 58% to 42%, to strengthen in November, 1999. A provision in the City Charter empowers the Board of Supervisors to amend the Ordinance to the extent it would not conflict with the Ordinance's original purpose and intent. Dissolving the SOTF or consolidating it with another policy body would indeed flout that original purpose and intent: The only other policy bodies authorized to adjudicate and act on sunshine-related matters – the Board of Supervisors and the Ethics Commission – have almost invariably shown apathy or antipathy toward holding sunshine-law violators to account.

San Francisco needs the SOTF. Please e-mail me with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Allyson M. Washburn, Ph.D., Chair  
San Franciscans for Sunshine Steering Committee  
amwashburn@comcast.net

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The following persons and organizations endorse the foregoing statement:

Thomas R. Burke, co-author of 1999 amendments (Prop. G) to Sunshine Ordinance  
Chris Roberts, freelance journalist  
Peter Warfield, Executive Director, Library Users Association

Electronic Frontier Foundation  
League of Women Voters of San Francisco  
Media Alliance  
Pacific Media Workers Guild (The NewsGuild-Communications Workers of America Local 39521, AFL-CIO)  
Race & Equity in All Planning Coalition