

From: [SPJ NorCal](#)
To: [commissionstreamlining](#)
Subject: Statement on SOTF recommendations
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Good evening,

SPJ NorCal's Freedom of Information Committee (a decades-old group fighting for press rights, open access, and government transparency in our region) would like to submit the below statement regarding the Commission Streamlining Task Force's recommendations for the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force.

Thank you,
Laura Wenus
Co-chair, SPJ NorCal [Freedom of Information Committee](#)

Freedom of Information Committee Warns Against Defanging Sunshine Ordinance Task Force

San Francisco's Sunshine Ordinance Task Force is at risk of being defanged and, without an assertive vote from the Board of Supervisors, disbanded.

Last month, the city's Commission Streamlining Task Force, charged with increasing the efficiency of citizen advisory and oversight boards, recommended that the city retain the get an automatic sunset date (barring action by the Board of Supervisors) and be classified as an advisory-only body.

The Sunshine Ordinance Task Force is a critical transparency tool, expressly established by voters in 1999 to defend the public's right to know. It is charged with establishing when city departments and officials have run afoul of public records law – to ensure public meetings are, indeed, open and that people have access to government records. The task force hears complaints from members of the public who believe their right to know has been violated, which makes it an important alternative to filing suit against the city, which is cost and time-prohibitive for most people.

As the [ordinance](#) states: "Only a strong Open Government and Sunshine Ordinance, **enforced by a strong Sunshine Ordinance Task Force**, can protect the public's interest in open government." (Emphasis ours.)

Because of this critical function, we believe it would be a disservice to the public interest to establish an automatic sunset date for this task force. While a vote from the Board of

Supervisors could prevent the task force from being disbanded, this would put an oversight body at the mercy of elected officials whom it is designed to hold accountable, a blatant conflict of interest.

Reclassifying the task force as an “advisory” body could effectively defang it. The streamlining commission’s [definition](#) of an “advisory committee” is “limited to providing advice and expertise...not able to direct staff or department activities.” That definition directly contradicts the [Sunshine Ordinance](#), which plainly states that the task force will make a “determination” of whether records are public, and “shall immediately order the custodian of the public record to comply with the person's request.”

Issuing an order is not mere “advice.”

On Nov. 5, the streamlining task force will hear public comment on its recommendation. The Board of Supervisors will ultimately decide which citizen boards to retain and which to eliminate.

Without an enforcement mechanism, the city’s Sunshine Ordinance is ineffective. The Freedom of Information Committee urges the city to respect the voters’ decision and the public’s right to know and retain the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force indefinitely as a decision-making body.