

## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 91

*Commending the Virginia Coalition for Open Government.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 15, 2016

Agreed to by the Senate, January 21, 2016

WHEREAS, established in 1996, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2016; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government is a nonpartisan, nonprofit alliance of citizens, journalists, advocacy groups, government employees and officials, and others who are committed to achieving greater transparency in local and state government in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government works collaboratively with legislators, public officials, educators, First Amendment advocates, and interested citizens to strengthen and expand statutory protection for public access to government meetings and records; and

WHEREAS, from 1998 to 2000, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government was a tireless advocate for the successful creation of the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council (FOIA Council), a model for other states seeking to enhance compliance with open-government laws; the FOIA Council's exceptional work has been a fruitful investment for the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government helped increase the FOIA Council's visibility, cosponsoring educational programs; designing and distributing promotional materials; archiving the council's opinions electronically and distributing them on social media; and including staff from the council as speakers in seminars, workshops, and conferences; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government participates regularly in the FOIA Council's advisory work groups and subcommittees, often gathering data useful to these groups' work in the formulation of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reforms; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government publishes free daily, monthly, and annual newsletters on open-government news throughout the Commonwealth and maintains a steady presence on social media platforms to engage with and inform others in Virginia and around the country who follow issues related to transparency in government; and

WHEREAS, on its website, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government maintains the only known free online archive of opinions interpreting FOIA, issued by state and federal courts, the FOIA Council, and the office of the Attorney General; the website also features the full text of FOIA, a citizen's pocket guide to the Act, how-to videos, a records-request template, and an archive of legislative proposals affecting access going back to 2006; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government maintains email and telephone hotlines to assist the public in understanding how FOIA works, handling approximately 600 inquiries each year; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government partnered with a state university in 2013 to assess the ease with which citizens could access their local government's budget online, prompting many localities to make access easier and more understandable; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government sponsors an annual fellowship for a rising second-year law student to review access, privacy, and security issues in depth; in 2015, it launched an internship for college students interested in learning about open government and the legislative process, named in memory of the Honorable Clifton "Chip" A. Woodrum; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government sponsors an annual conference on open-government issues at various historic and unique settings around the state; the conference highlights major contributions to open government by citizens, the media, and government officials throughout the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government has helped form successful freedom of information advocacy entities in North Carolina, Tennessee, and a number of other states, and it has a leadership role in the National Freedom of Information Coalition; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Virginia Coalition for Open Government on the occasion of its 20th anniversary; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Virginia Coalition for Open Government as an expression of the General Assembly's congratulations and gratitude for its outstanding commitment to the tenets of open government in the Commonwealth.

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