



KIRK WATSON

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March 30, 2010

Karen Robinson, Executive Director
Texas Department of Information Resources
PO Box 13564
Austin, TX 78711-3564

Dear Ms. Robinson:

This is an exciting time to be working in government. Technological advancements allow policy makers and agency administrators to share information with the public as never before. Such transparency is valuable for its own sake, of course. But it also allows for unprecedented, organic, market-based collaboration with citizens in how information can be consumed and how government operations can be made more efficient.

Texas has the opportunity to regain its leadership in the area of data transparency – without the need for agencies to design expensive applications through which the public would view that data. Instead, agencies need only make raw data sets freely available on-line, using open-standard data formats, and allow private citizens, businesses, non-profit groups, and others to develop new, innovative ways for sharing the information.

Governments across the country – from Washington D.C. to Utah to California – have taken steps to make such data sets available. It's past time that Texas catch up.

I am writing to ask you to review high-value data sets that your agency maintains – those that reflect and demonstrate the vital mission, operations and functions of your agency – and consider which of these sets can be made available in an open-standard format on your agency's web site or through a more general state data portal.

Clearly, any such disclosure would need to be consistent with Texas Public Information laws and other statutes. But it's also an opportunity for your agency to be proactively transparent without requiring citizens to file an Open Records request. Indeed, I believe and hope you'll find that you will be providing valuable information for Texans who would not have known to ask for it.

I look forward to working with you on this vital transparency effort. I hope you will feel free to discuss it with me – both in terms of opportunities and challenges or hurdles. If you need legislation filed in order to become more transparent, I welcome the chance to work on it. And I would sincerely appreciate your response and any thoughts and ideas you have on how to make this effort more effective.

Thank you for your help and your service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirk Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirk Watson