



National Freedom of
Information Coalition

<http://nfoic.org/>



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Peter Scheer, Executive Director
FIRST AMENDMENT COALITION

534 4th St., Suite B

San Rafael, CA 94901

415.460.5060 / 415.886.7081 (direct)

pscheer@firstamendmentcoalition.org

<http://www.firstamendmentcoalition.org/>

Knight FOI Fund supports another victorious transparency case

Court rules that the public interest in disclosing pension information outweighs the government's interest in keeping the information secret.

Columbia, Mo. and San Rafael, Ca. (July 19, 2010) – In a court challenge brought with the support of a Knight FOI Fund grant, proponents of government transparency won a significant victory in a California case involving a county's attempt to keep pension compensation to former employees secret.

A California judge ruled that Sacramento County must disclose the pension payments, rejecting the contention of the county retirement system that state law and the system's own regulations required it to keep the information private.

"The public interest in disclosing this information outweighs any interest in keeping it secret," Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Allen Sumner wrote in a ruling issued this week. "The public has a strong interest in knowing how government is spending their money, and a constitutional right to such information."

The decision came in a lawsuit brought by the Sacramento Bee newspaper and the California-based First Amendment Coalition (FAC), a nonpartisan group dedicated to free speech and access to government information. A [PDF of the decision](#) is available on the FAC site.

The National Freedom of Information Coalition (NFOIC), which administers the Knight FOI Fund, supported the legal challenge by the newspaper and the citizen group with a \$2,500 grant aimed at defraying the costs of bringing the challenge.

"Too many government entities and too many government officials would like to be left alone to make their own rules, and conjure up their own interpretations, when it comes to public

disclosure,” said Ken Bunting, executive director of the NFOIC. “The Knight FOI Fund is there to make certain that, even in tough economic times, challenges of this sort get made.”

Peter Scheer, executive director of the FAC, said Judge Sumner’s ruling was “a thoughtful, well-crafted opinion.”

“This may be the nail that finally closes the coffin on the effort to prevent the public from seeing pension information for county employees,” Scheer told The Bee.

The head of the Sacramento County Employees Retirement System has indicated it would consider an appeal.

In January, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the NFOIC announced the \$2 million, three-year grant to NFOIC, with a significant portion supporting meritorious FOI cases.

The Fund is intended to fuel the pursuit of important FOI cases by helping to defray upfront costs such as filing fees, depositions, court costs and other expenses associated with legal actions. The Fund does not cover attorney’s fees.

For more information on the **Knight FOI Fund**, including the selection process for grants and how to apply, see <http://www.nfoic.org/knight-foi-fund>.

The **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Since 1950, the Foundation has granted more than \$400 million to advance quality journalism and freedom of expression. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote community engagement and lead to transformational change. For more, visit <http://www.knightfdn.org/>.

The First Amendment Coalition (FAC) is a section 501(C)(3) nonprofit dedicated to freedom of speech and government transparency and accountability at the local and national levels. FAC initiates test-case litigation and files amicus briefs in key appeals; provides free legal help and information to journalists of all kinds; and, through widely published Op-Eds, educational programs and other means, is an outspoken public advocate for the First Amendment and the public’s right to know. Based in San Rafael, CA, FAC is supported by individuals, media firms and foundations. For more, visit <http://www.firstamendmentcoalition.org/>.

The **National Freedom of Information Coalition** is a national network of state freedom of information advocates, citizen-driven nonprofit freedom of information organizations, academic and First Amendment centers, journalistic societies and attorneys. Its mission is to foster government transparency at the state and local level. A unit of the Missouri School of Journalism, the NFOIC is an affiliate of the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute. NFOIC is based at the University of Missouri, home to the nation’s oldest Freedom of Information Center. For more, visit <http://www.nfoic.org/>.