

House Bill 3278 would allow the Attorney General's Office to unilaterally find that any public body has violated the Open Meetings Act without any formal legal action and without giving that body a meaningful opportunity to defend itself. A city council, school board, state agency, or county commission could be found guilty and fined based on the Attorney General's own opinion and a "more likely than not" finding. Once issued, these findings would be immediately enforceable with no meaningful opportunity to challenge the accusations in court first.

Open government is a pillar of public trust. That is exactly why one office should not be given unchecked power to adjudicate law violations behind closed doors. This bill would allow the Attorney General to act as investigator, adjudicator, and enforcer all at once, creating the kind of concentrated power our system of checks and balances is designed to prevent. Meanwhile, Oklahoma law already provides real penalties for Open Meeting Act violations, which are imposed through proper legal proceedings, notice, and an opportunity to be heard in court and defend.

Public bodies should be held accountable, but I cannot approve a bill that abandons due process and gives one office the power to investigate, decide, and enforce its own accusations.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Enrolled House Bill 3278.