

First Amendment Coalition Launches New Police Transparency Guide

Sheppard Mullin Special Counsel Tenaya Rodewald Co-Authors Guide That Provides Steps for Accessing Police Misconduct and Use-Of-Force Records in California

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Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP and the First Amendment Coalition today announced the release of their jointly published Police Transparency Guide. Sheppard Mullin special counsel Tenaya Rodewald is the lead author of the new guide, which provides easy-to-follow steps for accessing law enforcement misconduct and use-of-force records in California.

“It is critically important for the public to have better information about how police officers interact with the public and do their jobs, as recent protests helped show,” said Rodewald. “Protecting the public’s right of access to government records is essential to the democratic process. I’m very pleased to create a resource that is available to anyone seeking answers about police conduct in California.”

First Amendment Coalition Executive Director David Snyder, co-author of the guide, added, “It is designed to be the go-to resource for journalists, community groups, activists, lawyers who represent news companies and others who are seeking access to police personnel records and critical incident recordings, such as dash cams and body cam videos, now available under the California Public Records Act.”

The Police Transparency Guide features a Legal Compendium written by Rodewald, which gives a comprehensive overview of key statutes and developments in case law; a detailed FAQ; and two sample request letters customized for seeking these types of records and audio/visual recordings.

Rodewald is a recognized authority on the lawful access to police records and has recently led a series of pro bono cases protecting the First Amendment and the public’s right to know about police misconduct under California’s new statute, SB 1421. Known as The Right To Know Act, SB 1421 gives the public the right to access records relating to police misconduct and serious uses of force. SB 1421 faced numerous obstacles, including from police labor unions and others who sought to weaken it. Rodewald led a team of litigators representing FAC and several media organizations, and was the principal author of many of the key legal arguments that vindicated the public’s right to know. These teams succeeded in obtaining numerous trial court victories (in Los Angeles, Contra Costa County and San Diego), and two published appellate court decisions upholding the public right of access to records of past police uses of force and misconduct, a broad scope of the law going forward, and protecting the records requestors’ right to intervene in litigation in cases concerning public records. FAC has been involved in nearly one dozen SB 1421 cases since the law took effect, with Rodewald and Sheppard Mullin representing the organization in many instances. Numerous court victories have resulted in scores of records being released to news organizations, leading to essential accountability journalism that has illuminated previously opaque police personnel decisions.

To access the new Police Transparency Guide, visit FAC's website or download a complete copy from Sheppard Mullin here.

About the First Amendment Coalition

FAC is a nonprofit that advances free speech, government transparency and public participation in civic affairs. FAC defends press freedom through its journalist Subpoena Defense Initiative and combats government secrecy through its strategic litigation program, educational events and free resources. Visit FAC online at <https://firstamendmentcoalition.org/>. Follow FAC on Twitter @FACoalition.

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Tenaya Rodewald

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