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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Union County sued over requiring use of "official records request form."

Union County, NJ - Cranford resident Tina Renna has sued the Union County government over its recent policy change that requires citizens to submit any and all public records requests on the county's official request form. A copy of the lawsuit, recently filed in Superior Court by Richard Gutman, Esq., Renna's lawyer, is at <http://unioncountywatchdog.org/docs/LawSuitOPRARennav.UnionCounty.pdf> "I prefer to request records by email," said Renna. "It's faster, easier to keep a record of, and it has worked well until the county's recent policy change."

The County's policy change came on the heels of a February 17, 2006 Advisory Opinion issued by the Government Records Council (GRC). The GRC is the agency created by law in 2002 to enforce the Open Public Records Act (OPRA). The GRC's advisory opinion is at <http://www.state.nj.us/grc/pdf/AdvisoryOpinionNo2006-01.pdf>

Renna, who is also a board member of the New Jersey Foundation for Open Government, said that she is challenging this new procedure on behalf of records requesters throughout the state. "The whole idea behind OPRA is to make public records access quick and easy to get," she said. "Under the new policy, a person seeking a public record must now get a copy of a government agency's official records request form before even being able to submit a request." This causes a significant

delay, she noted, because most agencies, Union County included, do not post a copy of its official record request form on their official websites.

Along with not honoring OPRA requests not submitted on the standard form the clerk maintains that any attachments must also be submitted on the county's official form. The Clerk won't accept an email request yet in her email correspondence to routine records seekers regarding the new policy she states: "Although it is not required, in the interest of efficiency, I appreciate having an e-mail address where I can send the county's standard OPRA request correspondence."

Renna said "Why is it that the clerk can use email for efficiency yet records requestors are being forced to tediously obtain an official form and then fax or mail it to the clerk's office?" "The fact that freeholders and county management are given electronic tools such as Blackberries and cell phones at taxpayer's expense yet a taxpayer can't use electronic media to place an OPRA request through email is outrageous and just an attempt to discourage and hinder the public from seeking and accessing information."

Tina Renna is also the founder and President of the Union County Watchdog Association. The UCWA routinely acquires public records and posts them on their website for free public access.

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