

**Hunterdon Democrat**  
**Open-government advocate takes aim**  
**Posted by [rsbrickm](#) October 05, 2008 06:34AM**

HIGH BRIDGE -- Attorney John Paff is challenging the borough school board's policies on closed door meetings, or so-called "executive sessions." He's filed a complaint with the state's Government Records Council.

Mr. Paff, who runs the Libertarian Party's Open Government Advocacy Project, said High Bridge isn't the only school board that is violating the Open Public Records Act. But he said requiring people seeking public information "to 'present' their requests during regular business hours ... is off-putting, (and) dissuades people from asking for records."

In a letter to the school board, he said he had trouble getting a copy of the school's form for filing requests for public records. He said a secretary was reluctant to fax him the form "without first checking" with either the business administrator or "someone else with supervisory authority."

His letter asked that the board discuss at its meeting Monday whether it can make "topics of the private discussion (executive sessions) more explicit." The meeting will be at 7 p.m. in the Middle School on Thomas Street.

State law permits public bodies such as school boards to discuss some matters in closed session, such as personnel or contract negotiations, But the law requires boards to identify the topic under discussion, and Mr. Paff said some of the High Bridge board's resolutions authorizing closed sessions are "inadequate."

Quoting a case from another state, Mr. Paff said, "a board which announces only 'litigation' or 'personnel matters' for going into executive session has said nothing." Previously, school board President Janice Stemple has swept aside complaints that the board's closed meetings aren't properly described.

Mr. Paff has allies. Board members Jeffrey Raefski, an attorney, and Valerie Jordan have voted against meeting behind closed doors, arguing that the public should be better advised of the topics under discussion.

"I do not think what we are doing is legal," said Ms. Jordan. "I don't see why we don't discuss this. The law says the public should be told what we're doing."

"It should be discussed," said Mr. Raefski. "And it should be discussed in public, where everyone can hear it."

Mr. Paff has previously sued other entities over executive session rules and asked that the High Bridge board abide by a decision made in his favor in Middlesex County in a comparable case.

In February, the Franklin Township school board acquiesced to a similar request from Mr. Paff.