

Transparency needed, Fine supports video taping transit board meetings



17th District Rep. Laura Fine (D-Glenview) works on the floor of the Illinois State Capitol Building in Springfield, Thursday, May 16, 2013. | Rob Hart~Sun-Times Media

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The Illinois House of Representatives recently passed a pending bill requiring transit boards to broadcast public meetings.

State Rep. Laura Fine cosponsored the legislation, which the Illinois Senate is now reviewing.

Fine said House Bill 3672 was filed because governing boards such as the Regional Transportation Authority, Chicago Transit Authority, Metra and Pace Suburban Bus Service needed more public accountability.

The RTA oversees the three transportation services.

“Unfortunately, over the past several years we have learned of many instances of transit officials looking out for themselves, instead of the commuters they serve,” said Fine, D-17th.

“Lawmakers are working to address these serious issues and one of our first steps must be making their public meetings more accessible.”

On March 3, the House passed the bill 112-0.

In summer 2013, Metra commissioners drew sharp criticism for giving former Metra CEO Alex Clifford \$718,000 in severance after he proposed filing a whistle-blower lawsuit claiming political patronage, waste and unfair contracting.

Afterward, Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn appointed the 15-member Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force to study Clifford’s allegations and ways to end scandal.

Patrick Fitzgerald, former U.S. attorney in Chicago, was named to the panel.

On April 1, the task force recommended eliminating the RTA and merging CTA, Metra and PACE.

The task force also said Illinois, Chicago and county elected officials should govern the new agency’s functions.

In reworking the RTA, Fine said the first step was making its meetings accessible on the Internet.

“Time after time we have seen that shining a light on the government agencies reduces corruption and holds public officials accountable,” said Fine, whose district covers Evanston, Glenview, Golf, Morton Grove, Northbrook, Northfield, Skokie and Wilmette.

“This measure allows citizens, regardless of their location, to know what actions public officials are taking on their behalf.”