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Governor



MARK J.F. SCHROEDER
Commissioner

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Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary and Elizabeth Fine, Counsel
NYS Governor's Office
Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Secretary Keogh and Counsel Fine:

I am pleased to write in response to your September 20, 2021 memorandum regarding improvements to government transparency and inviting each agency to assess ways in which we may be more transparent. DMV has performed a thorough review of its current policies and practices with regard to transparency. This included a review of compliance with items such as Project Sunlight filing and FOIL responsiveness, as well as a review of how information about the Department is provided to the public. As a result of that review, DMV has identified key opportunities to improve transparency through increased access to data and broader avenues for public involvement.

Assessment of Current Policies and Practices

The DMV website serves as the primary tool for public transparency, providing clear and understandable explanations of what are often complicated statutory requirements, like the compulsory auto insurance program. The DMV website also offers more targeted transparency tools, like a prominent homepage link to simple instructions on how to submit a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request by either email or postal mail, and links to online services and field office locations as well as DMV statistics regarding driver licenses and vehicle registrations. While the department is constantly updating and improving its website, a comprehensive redesign is planned for 2022, which will result in a more user-friendly and modern site.

DMV is a prominent data provider to the New York State Open Data Portal, which offers public access to a vast array of data, including statewide, sortable data regarding auto dealerships, inspection stations, repair shops and other regulated businesses. The portal also offers detailed information on the kinds of vehicles and boats registered throughout the state, traffic tickets issued by violation type and location, and data on those holding driver licenses. DMV has staff dedicated to maintaining the DMV data in the portal, who also continually identify, develop and post new types of data to share with the public. DMV uses sources such as FOIL requests, for example, to identify additional candidate data sets.

In terms of meetings and events, DMV does not hold events covered by the Open Meetings Law, and its record retention and destruction policies are dictated specifically by the Vehicle and Traffic Law. DMV does maintain an internal calendar listing its legally mandated reports, which we use to maintain the timely issuance of required reports. The list is continually reviewed for improvement in the event that new or existing mandates are implemented.

dmv.ny.gov

DMV has made great strides in improving response to FOIL requests. DMV's FOIL office typically receives about 3,500 requests a year, mostly seeking documents specific to the requester, such as their driving record. The office's performance is currently exceeding our responsiveness goals, with less than one percent of requests remaining unfulfilled within 15 days of receipt.

Lastly, in terms of policies, DMV recently updated its written Project Sunlight policy, reminding all staff of the obligations to publicly post to the Project Sunlight website all appearances at the agency covered by the Sunlight law.

Improving Transparency at DMV

While DMV is proud of the progress we have made in providing access to clear and easy to understand information, we also realize that we can do more. To that end, DMV is committed to improvements and new approaches across several areas over the next year as outlined below that will improve the transparency of our work.

Better Online Access to Information and Services

DMV will continue to offer more services and information on our website that will make it easier for New Yorkers to learn about, and do business with, our agency. Beginning in 2022, as part of a larger agency transformation effort, DMV will begin a project to improve the usability and content of the website to provide easy access to information in plain language. This will include user-friendly online services for popular transactions such as license and registration renewals. Some of these new online services, such as online permit tests, are already available on the DMV website in advance of the upcoming redesign.

As part of the website redesign process, DMV will focus on improved agency transparency by creating a dedicated, centralized access point or "portal" for key agency data and metrics. Linked directly from the agency homepage, the portal will explain and promote DMV's transparency efforts in one place, highlighting recent successes as well as planned initiatives. The following are examples of some of the information that DMV could include to increase transparency:

- DMV Strategic Plan
- Commissioner's budget testimony
- Links the DMV's enacted budget
- DMV Key Performance Metrics (transaction volumes and trends, reservation statistics, call center statistics, success in driving Real ID adoption, etc.)
- Links to statewide governmental data sources such as NYS Contract Search, Project Sunlight, SeeThroughNY, Open Book New York, and Open Data New York
- Expansion of data sets provided through Open Data New York
- List of current vendors
- DMV Calendar of events that includes Commissioner public events, as well as key reminder dates (motorcycle registration, voter registration, distracted driver awareness week, regulatory agenda release, etc.)
- Instructions on how to report issues, such as inappropriate DMV employee behavior, poor customer service experience, suspected malfeasance, or incidents of discrimination or sexual harassment

The portal will also increase public engagement by posting initiatives that DMV is considering, with a particular emphasis on the projects being undertaken by the DMV Transformation effort. By inviting public feedback on these proposals, DMV will increase the opportunity for public input into agency decision-making.

Increase Use of Social Media for Key Topics

DMV utilizes its social media platforms as informational tools that help ensure New Yorkers' compliance with laws and regulations, assist with the completion of DMV transactions, and alert New Yorkers of office closings, processing delays and potential phishing scams. Dedicated DMV staff also provide individualized customer service and support to hundreds of customers each week through these channels via comments and direct messages. The social media use will be expanded to, among other new programs, produce a series of instructional YouTube videos in multiple languages aimed at helping DMV customers navigate particularly complex issues, such as insurance lapses and repeat impaired driving penalties, as well as unique transactions, like lease buyouts and intra-family sales upon the death of a loved one.

Pilot Community Forums to Increase Public Outreach

DMV will pilot a series of "DMV Town Halls," which will initially be conducted remotely, where the Commissioner and senior staff will discuss topics relevant to the specific audience, then invite questions that would be answered in the live session. DMV envisions having regional events targeting projects and issues with a local focus, as well as statewide sessions for particular advocacy groups (e.g., auto buyers, immigration advocates), regulated entities (e.g., auto dealers, repair shops) and DMV employees. Based on the success of the initial pilots DMV would look to expand these efforts over time.

Implementation and Monitoring

To assure that all elements of the plan are implemented, DMV will establish a Transparency Working Group who will be responsible and accountable for implementation. The group will be chaired by a member of the DMV executive team.

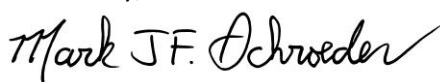
DMV can implement many of the opportunities identified above with internal resources and will look to augment with additional external resources to shorten implementation timelines (e.g., website content redesign) where possible. In addition, while some of the actions can begin immediately, such as increasing social media interaction, others will take longer and require a phased approach. For instance, the overall upgrade of the DMV website content may take a full year, but DMV can begin to add additional information immediately.

To help the public and DMV stakeholders understand what will change and when, DMV will kick off its efforts to increase transparency by creating a page on its website to provide updates and schedules for each of our efforts identified above as we move forward. This will allow us to keep the public better informed while inviting input and comment on our plans as we move forward.

The Transparency Working Group will develop metrics to measure the success of our actions. Those metrics will be posted to the website on a quarterly basis to monitor and measure success as we progress.

In closing, DMV is happy to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Mark J.F. Schroeder
Commissioner