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March 18, 2026

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Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association honors leader in transparency law as 2025 Advocate of the Year

STATE COLLEGE — The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is honoring Terry Mutchler with its prestigious Advocate of the Year award. Mutchler, chair of Philadelphia-based Obermayer Rebmann Maxwell & Hippel LLP's Transparency and Public Data Practice, is a former journalist and the first executive director of Pennsylvania's Office of Open Records.

The award was presented to Mutchler at a Sunshine Week forum, "Sunlight in Happy Valley: Confronting Penn State's Transparency Gap," held on Penn State's University Park campus in State College.

"We are so appreciative of the many contributions that Terry has made on the government transparency front," said PNA President William Cotter. "Not only did she launch the Office of Open Records from the ground up and trained reporters, government officials and the public on the state's overhauled Right-to-Know Law, she has been a steadfast champion of government openness, accountability, and public access to information transparency throughout her career."

Mutchler, a Penn State alumnae, spent four years on the staff of the *Daily Collegian*, where she also served as editorial page editor. She completed a summer internship at the *Pocono Record* before beginning her post-graduation career at the *Morning Call* in Allentown. She later produced award-winning work for the Associated Press, covering politics in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Alaska, and Illinois. After her journalism career, she went on to become an attorney.

She clerked for the Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Benjamin Miller, a Republican, and also served in the executive office during President Bill Clinton's administration. Mutchler also served as Illinois' first public access counselor before returning to her home state of Pennsylvania when she was tapped to head up the nascent Office of Open Records.

Gov. Ed Rendell, who had hired Mutchler to establish the Office of Open Records, told PennLive on the office's 10th anniversary, "the single most important decision I made for the open government was hiring Terry Mutchler. She told me 'no' when she needed to and she stayed true to the mission of open government."

Following her time at the Office of Open Records where she was praised for improving public access and transparency, she practiced transparency law where she took on several high-profile cases including defending state lawmakers and assisting journalists in obtaining public records.

Most recently, Mutchler argued a case before an en banc panel of the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court about [a records request](#) to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for historical records they turned over to Ancestry.com to digitize for them.

The commission denied the request, saying it had no responsive records in its possession. That gave rise to the question of who now owns these public records entrusted to the commission's care including military records, birth and death certificates, public wills, records of enslaved people and their manumissions, William Penn's land records and more.

"I'm honored to be Advocate of the Year by this extraordinary group - to join those that are actively protecting a bedrock of this democracy - public records and transparency in government," Mutchler said.

Mutchler's passion for promoting transparency in government runs deep.

"While it sounds strange to say I feel this work in my heart and bones — and always have," she said. "I do feel that transparency is a bedrock of democracy, part of its DNA, and that doesn't mean to just fling open the filing cabinets as many people mistake that that's what I do. It means applying the law.

"There are records that need to be protected obviously and I see the dangers of releasing those every day without due process, but the greatest danger to the United States of America in terms of this aspect of democracy is when we forget that citizens own public records."

Mutchler recently was named to [Super Lawyers](#) list of the nation's top attorneys in the areas of media and advertising law practice.

Every year, PNA recognizes dedicated leadership and outstanding advocacy for the Pennsylvania news media industry with the Advocate of the Year award. Previous honorees are: state Rep. Ryan Bizzarro, an Erie County Democrat; Michael Berry, a partner in the Philadelphia office of Ballard Spahr; former Democratic U.S. Sen. Robert P. Casey; state Rep. Kerry A. Benninghoff, a Republican representing Centre and Mifflin counties; state Sen. Patrick J. Stefano, a Republican serving Bedford, Fayette, Somerset and Westmoreland counties; and Democratic state Rep. Robert L. Freeman serving Northampton County.

About PNA:

Founded in 1925, PNA is a nonprofit trade association for print and digital news media in Pennsylvania. Its mission is to advance the business interests of Pennsylvania news media and to promote the importance of a free and independent press.