his irrelevant whether reporters pursuing information have pure intentions. "If it's public, I have a right rentions." If it's public, I have a right of public officials and media pegno. Battles over use of Michigan's Freedom of Information Act came to a head last week when a panel of Detroit and state and newspeople debated the growing tendency of some local officials to deny access to public documents. The problem spreads across Detroit and the suburbs, but panelists said the city of Detroit and Detroit Public Schools are the most difficult sources.

"Your perspective is that report-ers come in with halo in place and wings flapping," said Robert Berg, press secretary for Detroit Mayor Coleman Young.

Referring to newspeople as "the pack," Berg said, "the intentions of reporters are not always nure." He cited a Detroit News memo (issued before Gannett boughtithe paper) instructing the staff to look for "horrors that can be discussed at subur-ban cocktall parties."

ban cocktail parties."

REPLIED NEWS reporter Fred
Girard: "I don't buy it, but I'm glad
to hear it (city's position) stated so
bailty.

Both the state of the state of the state of the state
or monidoration," sald Girard, who
harged that public officials often
ask the Irrelevant question: "Why do
you want It?"

The panel discussed a survey confucted by the Detroit Freedom of Information Communitiee, composed
of newspaper, radio, television and
public relations people, which
showed that 55 of area journalists
say they have been denied access to

public records within the past two years, most of them more than than twice.

Poll respondents said most denials came from city government officame from city government olli-cials, followed by state agencies and

cials, followed by state agencies and courts.

Nearly two-thirds filled Michigan Preedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests after being turned down for records. One-third, expressed distatisfaction with the records they ultimately received, the survey found.

Many reporters said the 1976 law needs to be strengthened, perhaps by simplifying enforcement.

simplifying enforcement.

THE REPORTERS work at 26 newspaper, magazine, radio and television outlets in the tri-county area. They were surveyed last month by the Fol Committee.
One-fourth, or 108 of the 407 reporters targeted for the study, answered the surveys. At the 12 Observe & Eccentric Newspapers, half the 36 editors and reporters covering government responded.

At the state level, the Department of Corrections has the most requests under of the Freedom of Information Act, according to deputy director Leo LaLonde. Nearly 25,000 are filed each year — 90 percent of them from prisoners.

"They want their files, and they have a right to their files," LaLonde

said. "But one wanted a list of employees, another the prohitecturel plans of all prisons. Many do it to harass us. They want to sue us."

STATE REP. Perry Bullard, D. Ann Arbor, sponsor of the law, suggested enforcement could be simplified by allowing district court rather than circuit court saits

tied by allowing district court rather than circuit court suits.

The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Bullard rejected a suggestion that a non-governmental panel be an intermediary in pressgovernment disputes. "The bureauc-

government disputes. "The bursuncary that creates the record controls the file," he said.

Bullard said impetus for open government came from the Watergate scandal that brought down President Richard Nixon.

He said the law, written in layman's language, covers films, tapes, microfilms, microfiches and computer tapes as well as written documents.

ments.

Mike Westaland, former newspaper reporter and now with WDIVV, said governmental dealta of
documents occur because "they have
something to hide and politics — everyone's afraid of the mayor
(Young)."

Wendtand said newspeople — and
the public — should file For requests
more often and "not let 'em get
away with It."

away with it."

ONE-FOURTH of the reporters

who responded to the survey said likey used the state lew to gein access to guide information only once or twice. Another quarter said they have used it at least 10 times.

Many said government officials censored documents and failed to comply with legal deadlines for producing records. One-third of the reporters said they had never filed an FOIA request, either because they didn't need to or had obtained records in other ways. The study also found that:

• Nearly 40 percent said government officials don't provide documents within the 5-15-day period required by law.

• 68 percent of the reporters, primarily daily newspaper reporters, said their employers encourage them to use the law.

Generally, the public is entitled to

Generally, the public is entitled to examine records of government bodies or agencies. Some records — such as police investigative files and

The Detroit Fol Committee was created last year when Detroit Cori.
poration Counsel Donald Pailen went
to jail rather than give up city
records that disclosed the city's hand
line of a 540 million redevelopment

to Jail rather than give up city records that disclosed the city's handling of a \$40 million redevelopment deal involving Chrysler Corp. In resusing to give up the records, Pailen defied a court order to comply with a request under the POIA.

Committee chair is John T. Wark, a Detroit News reporter.

Founding associations include the Detroit Press Club, Newspaper Guild Local 22 and the local chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Association of Black Journalists, the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, American Women in Radio & Television, Women in Communications, Inc., and the Public Relations.

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Professional Malpractice
March 7. Samuel I. Bernstein, William R. Buesser and Frederick W. Lawk will discuss whether you should sue your doctor, dentist, lawyer or other professional, how to find an attorney, what to expect of the courts and what can happen.

What Are You Really Buying When You Buy A House? March 14. Phillip G. Adkison, James Belisson, and Lori Churura, broker, president of Middleton Real Estate Training and Lori Churura, broker, president of Middleton Real Estate Training. Will discuss purchasing a home.

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cussion of what insurance policles really mean, what they cover, and what you should buy. Speakers will be Samuel I. Bernstein and David A. Kanaan.

The People's Court - Small Claims - March 28. How to collect what is owed you without an attorney through the Michigan "People's Court," including all procedures, paperwork and hints - from filing through final cellection of amounts less than \$1,500. Speakers will be District Judge Stephen C. Cooper of Southfield, attorney Larry Korn, and Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick of the Circuit Court.
All sessions are free, but reserva-

All sessions are free, but reserva-All sessions are free, but reserva-tions are necessary. Course materi-als will be furnished, and certificates will be awarded to those who com-plete all four sessions. For additional information, call the Oakland County Bar Association at 338-2100 or 398-3937.









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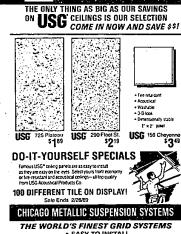
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