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'I'M COMING FULL CIRCLE': Indianapolis Attorney Jennifer Ruby Steps Into Role As State's Public Access Counselor, Muses Changes To Streamline Office





Indiana Gov. Mike Braun on March 28, 2025, tapped longtime Indianapolis attorney Jennifer Ruby to serve as public access counselor after the position faced some changes within the last year. (Photo/courtesy of Gov. Mike Braun's office)

By Juliann Ventura
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When Jennifer Ruby was appointed as Indiana's public access counselor by Gov. Mike Braun last month, she suggested it felt like she was tapping into some responsibilities and experiences she had earlier in her career.

The longtime attorney, who also has nearly 15 years of experience in Indiana state and local government, said she had filled public records requests and attended public meetings while working for the state in the 1990s.

"In a way, I feel like I'm coming full circle," Ruby told The Indiana Citizen during an interview last week, citing an earlier role of hers at the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

"One of my first jobs there was to work in solid hazardous waste management, and I facility permits, all waste facilities, transfer stations," said Ruby, whose [LinkedIn profile](#)

shows her working at the department from 1996 to 1999. "And so I was responsible for filling FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests and attending public meetings and being the public hearing officer and making sure public comments were taken, and making sure all these rules were followed."

Republican Gov. Mike Braun's appointment of Ruby comes as the position has been in limbo the last few months after Luke Britt, the state's longest-serving public access counselor, stepped down in February. Later that month, Braun temporarily appointed former Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter.

During the interview, Ruby also referenced other aspects of her experience, such as her master's degree in planning from Indiana University's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

"With my planning degree – I have an American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) designation – a lot of that work is making sure that you do get community involvement, and the different kinds of involvement, from charrettes to public hearings to making sure you can get access to the documents and that the public is aware and has a chance to be heard," Ruby said.

"And as a lawyer, of course, I want to make sure these things are followed and that the public is respected and the rules and regulations are followed," said Ruby, a graduate of Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law and the chief executive, president and lead attorney at her Indianapolis law firm, Ruby Law, which counsels people and businesses on estate planning and general business concerns, according to her LinkedIn profile. She earned a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from Purdue University.

Ruby said during an interview that she already envisions making some changes in the public access counselor role that could streamline some procedures and make it easier to research past opinions.

The position itself has also faced some changes in the last year, after Sen. Aaron Freeman, R-Indianapolis, filed a controversial amendment to a House bill that caused the public access counselor to take a stricter approach when interpreting laws for advisory opinions. The amendment also effectively made the role an at-will employee of the governor, no longer subject to serving a fixed, four-year term.

The bill, which had [raised concerns](#) about



government transparency and public access, was [signed into law](#) by then-Gov. Eric Holcomb in March 2024.

Britt had told The Indiana Citizen last month that while he did not experience any limitations related to the amended law as public access counselor, he suggested he did grapple with reconciling the amended law with the state's public access laws. When confronted with questions around interpretation, the state's public access laws state, "the law should be liberally construed in favor of openness," according to Indiana's [Public Access Handbook](#), and Indiana Code for both the [Access to Public Records Act](#) and [Open Door Law](#). "Liberal construction" in law generally refers to a broad rather than narrow interpretation of a statute and is an apolitical term.

Ruby, however, said she's not worried about having to reconcile the state's public access laws with last year's amended law, which now requires the state's public access counselor to consider only "plainly written" Indiana law and "valid" court opinions when writing an advisory opinion.

"We're still going to have to follow court opinion as much as possible because they could always overrule some of the work that I've done or what the people who are trying to get access to records have done, so we need to make sure we follow that," Ruby said, adding that she wants to rely on transparency as much as possible.

"There's a lot of different facets to this, and I'm going to try my best wherever possible to be as transparent as possible," Ruby said.

As Ruby steps into the state's top public records expert role, she said she's excited to help people and "get back to public service." She said on Friday of last week that she's already been asking questions about her budget and hiring people for her office.

"I've already started asking those questions: Who (do) I need to know? How do I get that information? And then started thinking about how I want to try to hire and what that person will look like," Ruby said, adding that she's talked to state personnel and the state budget agency.

Ruby added that while there's a lot of correspondence to rummage through, she would like, if possible, to hire at least one person within the next month.

Ruby said she already has some suggestions for making procedures within the office more efficient and wondered about some more structured ways of filing advisory opinions that are similar to previous ones.

"I would like to try to set up some operating procedures, so that we don't have to keep writing the same opinion over and over and over again. We can maybe refer back to it or explain how it's different, so that future public access counselors have more of a roadmap of how they're going to handle it," Ruby said, calling on her experience as a planner.

She also mused about adding a mechanism to search through the opinions. "I would like to be able to have them maybe keyword searched, so that if they have two or three of the similar issues, it'll bring out four or five similar advisory opinions, and you can see where they are similar and where they're different."

She also touted consistency as an important part of the role. "As a lawyer, you don't want to sound like you're talking out of both sides of your mouth, you want to be clear you're being very consistent about what it is you're answering."

During the interview, Ruby championed transparency and public access as fundamental to government, saying, "We can't have checks and balances if we don't know what everybody's doing."

"That's part of the way government is supposed to work, is we've got judicial, executive and legislative all keeping checks and balances on each other, and then a big aspect around all of that, or with all that, is the public being able to have their say and to know what's going on, because if they don't know what's going on, they don't know where to get what they need, and they also don't know where they need to challenge," Ruby said.

Julian Ventura is a political reporter who grew up in Indianapolis. Prior to joining The Citizen, Julian reported in Washington, D.C., chasing down federal lawmakers on Capitol Hill, and was most recently on The Hill's breaking news team covering all things politics and policy. She earned her master's in journalism from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and her bachelor's in international studies and criminology from Butler University (Go Dawgs!). Julian's reporting has been featured in The Washington Post, ProPublica and numerous state and local publications.

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