Wednesday ceremony lauds students, FOI act

WINSTED – The Shafeek Nader Trust for the Community Interest is sponsoring the third annual Civic Freedom of Information Award in a ceremony at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the auditorium of Northwestern Connecticut Community-Technical College. Attorney General Richard Blumenthal will be the guest speaker. Rose Nader will present the awards to the three winners.

March 16 is the anniversary of James Madison's birthday and its is celebrated as Freedom of Information Day throughout the country. Madison was a great advocate of the public right to information about the government. It was Madison who said, "A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern Ignorance; And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

For the past three years community lawyer Charlene LaVoie has presented information on FOI laws to The Gilbert School students who have competed in a quiz and essay contest. Each year three students are selected as winners of the award based on their knowledge of the law and its importance. This year students were asked how they would use the FOI Act to obtain information which would benefit public health or safety.

As a part of this year's celebration, a program about the federal and state FOI laws was produced by the office of the community lawyer and students from The Gilbert School. This video program includes Winsted native and citizen advocate Ralph Nader and Theresa Amato, executive director of the Citizen Advocacy Center in Elmhurst, Ill., and formerly director of the FOI Clearinghouse, Washington, D.C. The program is introduced by Gilbert School students Jenny Brooke Condon, Jen Parmelee and Melissa Welcome and was taped and edited by Par Rasmusson and Miche Caine of Mad River TV.

The Nader Trust and office of the community lawyer invite the public to attend this ceremony and celebrate this important legislation which deepens the democracy because it guarantees the right to access to government information.