The #MeToo movement has revitalized an appreciation for transparency. Sexual misconduct festered in darkness and silence across society until people started talking to expose injustice; cultural change was delayed until facts were unavoidable.

The California Legislature has responded to these injustices by introducing legislation that would prevent sexual misconduct victims from being silenced in the future.

California needs to apply that philosophy to records of police misconduct.

The Sacramento Bee recently reported that 172 people died at the hands of law enforcement last year. But there are not 172 reports on who killed whom, why, what evidence was ultimately uncovered, whether an officer’s actions were deemed proper, whether an officer was disciplined for the shooting, or whether an officer was responsible for multiple uses of force.

Sadly, California law keeps all of this information secret. That’s because of an outdated law that Gov. Jerry Brown signed in the 1970s to make all police personnel records confidential. It was a response to a widespread practice of departments destroying records. In essence, police have benefitted from an unparalleled level of secrecy protections to shield their bad behavior from the public.

Even worse, a 2006 case issued by the California Supreme Court expanded this law to shut down the little shred of access to police records that the public had. Today, agencies are loathe to share even police reports which used to be commonly accessible.

But after 30 years of secrecy, the legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown have an opportunity to change this. SB 1421 creates disclosure requirements that peel back the secrecy laws long imposed to justify keeping the public from knowing what happens when police engage in unlawful or deadly conduct.

Changing the law would change California’s culture. Families won’t be left in the dark, waiting for answers and closure when a loved one is killed by police. Prosecutors will know if police are accused of lying which could harm the officer’s credibility and ultimately a criminal prosecution case. Communities will know if their departments are keeping trouble cops off the streets. News organizations will be able to report on critical incidents and police activity by accessing primary source documents.

Sunlight is the best disinfectant. The sexual misconduct revolution shows that only when those accused of misconduct are forced from the shadows, their behavior can be changed and stopped. The Legislature should work to cure the ills of excessive and unlawful police activity by ensuring they can no longer use secrecy laws to shield them from the light. Passing SB 1421is just the first step.