

PROTECTING ★ THE ★ UNPROTECTED



OHIO SUNSHINE LAWS

2024 AN OPEN GOVERNMENT RESOURCE MANUAL



DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL



Ohio Sunshine Laws 2024

My Fellow Ohioans,

What follows is a general guide to Ohio's open-government laws – the 2024 Sunshine Laws Manual. It's a road map for citizens who want more information about how their government operates and how it uses their money.

The public's right to access such information is a cornerstone of our democracy. So, in a very real sense, this guide equips Ohioans with the knowledge they need to keep watch over the officials they elect and the agencies that are in place at every level of state government.

This year's manual includes a new chapter devoted to issues and exemptions that apply to law enforcement-related records and to law enforcement officers, as well as to issues and exemptions that apply to crime victims or witnesses. The chapter explains the distinction between discretionary and mandatory exemptions and provides numerous examples of each.

Close observers also will notice that the manual is more user-friendly. For the first time, hyperlinks have been added to all cases, statutes, court rules and opinions written by my office, so users can go directly to those resources.

Besides helping to educate the public about accessing public records, my office also educates government officials about their responsibility to make those records available.

The AGO's Public Records Unit, which assembles this manual every year, partners with the Ohio Auditor of State's Office to provide free Sunshine Laws training. Public officials (or their designees) are required to complete the training at least once per elected term. To assist local governments, my team also created a model public-records policy that they can use as a guide when creating their own policies. These resources and more are available at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Sunshine.

The public's right to know is an essential guardrail to keep government on the straight and narrow. I sincerely hope that the 2024 Sunshine Laws Manual helps Ohioans access the public records they seek as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Yours,



Dave Yost
Attorney General



Ohio Sunshine Laws 2024

Readers may find the latest edition of this publication and the most updated public records and open meetings laws by visiting the following web sites. To request additional paper copies of this publication, contact:

Ohio Attorney General
Public Records Unit
Re: Sunshine Manual Request
30 E. Broad St., 16th Floor
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www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Sunshine

or

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www.OhioAuditor.gov

We welcome your comments and suggestions.

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Glossary

When learning about the Ohio Sunshine Laws, you may confront some legal terms that are unfamiliar to you. Below are the more common terms used in this handbook.

Charter

A charter is an instrument established by the citizens of a municipality, which is roughly analogous to a state's constitution. A charter outlines certain rights, responsibilities, liberties, or powers that exist in the municipality.

Discovery

Discovery is a pre-trial practice by which parties to a lawsuit disclose to each other documents and other information. The practice serves the dual purpose of permitting parties to be well-prepared for trial and enabling them to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their case.

In camera

In camera means “in chambers.” A judge will often review records that are at issue in a public records dispute *in camera* to evaluate whether they are subject to any exemptions or defenses that may prevent disclosure.

Injunction

An injunction is a court order commanding that a person act or cease to act in a certain way. For instance, a person who believes a public body has violated the Open Meetings Act will file a complaint seeking injunctive relief. The court may then issue an order enjoining the public body from further violations of the act and requiring it to correct any damage caused by past violations.

Litigation

The term “litigation” refers to the process of carrying on a lawsuit, i.e., a legal action and all the proceedings associated with it.

Mandamus

Mandamus means “we command.” In this area of law, it refers to the legal action filed by a party who believes that he or she has been wrongfully denied access to public records. The full name of the action is a petition for a writ of mandamus. If the party filing the action, or “relator,” prevails, the court may issue a writ commanding the public office or person responsible for the public records, or “respondent,” to correctly perform a duty that has been violated.

Pro se

Pro se means “for oneself.” The term refers to people who represent themselves in court, acting as their own legal counsel.

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Links to Resources

The Ohio Public Records Act, R.C. 149.43

<https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-149.43>

The Ohio Open Meetings Act, R.C. 122.121

<https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-121.22>

The Ohio Attorney General's Office Sunshine Laws Webpage

<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Legal/Sunshine-Laws>

Links to the current Sunshine Laws Manual, [Appendix A](#) (Ohio statutes that exempt specific records from public records disclosure), [Appendix B](#) (Attorney General Opinions interpreting the Public Records Act), [Appendix C](#) (Attorney General Opinions interpreting the Open Meetings Act), the [Model Public Records Policy](#), information on [Training Opportunities](#), and other helpful resources on Ohio's Sunshine Laws.

Ohio Laws and Administrative Rules

<https://codes.ohio.gov/>

Links to the Ohio Constitution, Ohio Revised Code, and Ohio Administrative Code.

Ohio Rules of Court

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/laws-rules/ohio-rules-of-court/>

Links to Ohio rules of court, including the Rules of Civil Procedure, Rules of Criminal Procedure, Rules of Juvenile Procedure, Supreme Court Rules of Practice, and Rules of Superintendence of the Courts of Ohio.

The Ohio Auditor of State

<https://ohioauditor.gov/>

Links to Sunshine Laws training offered by the Auditor of State's Office and other Sunshine Laws resources.

The Ohio Court of Claims

<https://ohiocourtofclaims.gov/public-records/>

Information on how to file a public records complaint in the Ohio Court of Claims, the mediation and case management process, and the case timeline.

The Supreme Court of Ohio

<https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/>

The Ohio General Assembly

<https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/>

The Ohio History Connection and State Archives

<https://www.ohiohistory.org/>

Resources on records retention issues, including identifying and preserving records with historical value.

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The Department of Administrative Services

<https://das.ohio.gov/home/policy-finder/filter-policy-finder>

Examples of state agency records retention schedules, searchable by agency name or record category.

The Ohio County Archivists and Records Managers Association

<https://www.ohiohistory.org/research/local-government-records-program/county-archivists-records-management-association/>

Resources for county records managers.

The Ohio Electronic Records Committee (OhioERC)

<https://ohioerc.org/>

Resources for public offices on creating, maintaining, preserving, and accessing electronic records.

The Ohio Public Records Act

Chapter One: Public Records Defined

Overview of the Ohio Public Records Act

Ohio law has long provided for public scrutiny of state and local government records.¹

Ohio's Public Records Act details what is a "public record," the obligations of a public office, and the rights and obligations of a public records requester. The Act also excludes certain records from disclosure and enforces production when an office denies a proper public records request. The pages that follow will explain all these principles, and below is a brief overview of them.

Any person may request to inspect or obtain copies of public records from a public office that keeps those records. A public office must organize and maintain its public records in a manner that meets its duty to respond to public records requests and must keep a copy of its records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public. When it receives a proper public records request, unless part or all of a record is exempt from release, a public office must promptly provide inspection of the requested records or copies of the records (at cost or no cost) within a reasonable period of time.

Unless a specific law states otherwise, a requester does not have to provide a reason for wanting records, give their name, or make the request in writing. However, the requester does have to be clear and specific enough for the public office to reasonably identify what public records they seek. A public office can properly deny a request if the office no longer keeps the records pursuant to its records retention schedules, if the request is for documents that are not records of the office, or if the requester does not revise an ambiguous or overly broad request.

The Ohio General Assembly has passed several laws that protect certain records by requiring or permitting a public office to withhold them from public release. When a public office invokes one of these exemptions, the office may only withhold a record or part of a record that is clearly covered by the exemption. The public office must also tell the requester the legal basis—statutory or case law authority—of the exemption.

A person aggrieved by the alleged failure of a public office to comply with an obligation of the Public Records Act may choose to either (1) file a complaint against the public office in the Court of Claims or (2) file a mandamus lawsuit against the public office. The Court of Claims process provides an expedited procedure for resolving public records disputes. To commence an action in the Court of Claims, the requester must file a specified complaint form, attaching the original public records request and any written responses. The case will first be referred to mediation, and then, if mediation is unsuccessful, proceed on a "fast track" resolution process that is overseen by a special master. In a mandamus lawsuit, the requester will have the burden of showing that he or she made a proper public records request, and the public office will have the burden of showing the court that it complied with the obligation(s) allegedly violated. If the public office cannot show that it complied with its legal obligation(s), the court will order the public office to provide any improperly withheld record, and the public office may be required to pay a civil penalty and attorney fees.

The Ohio Public Records Act

Chapter One: Public Records Defined

I. Chapter One: Public Records Defined

The Public Records Act applies *only* to “public records,” which the Act defines as “records kept by any public office.”² When making or responding to a public records request, it is important to first establish whether the items sought are really “records,” and if so, whether they are currently being “kept by” an organization that meets the definition of a “public office.” This Chapter will review the definitions of each of these key terms and how Ohio courts have applied them.

A. What Are “Records”?

1. Statutory definition – R.C. 149.011(G)

The term “records” includes “any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including an electronic record as defined in [R.C. 1306.01], created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office of the state or its political subdivisions, which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office.”

2. Records and non-records

If a document or other item does not meet all three parts of the definition of a “record,” then it is a non-record and is *not* subject to the Public Records Act or Ohio’s records retention requirements. The next paragraphs explain how items in a public office might meet or fail to meet the three parts of the definition of a record in R.C. 149.011(G).³

Part 1: “[A]ny document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including an electronic record as defined in section 1306.01 of the Revised Code . . .”

This first element of the definition of a record focuses on the existence of a recording medium; in other words, something that contains information in fixed form. The physical form of an item does not matter so long as it can record information. A paper or electronic document, email,⁴ video,⁵ map, blueprint, photograph, voicemail message, text message,⁶ or any other reproducible storage medium could be a record. This element is broad and with the exemption of one’s thoughts and unrecorded conversations, most public office information is stored on a fixed medium of some sort. A request for unrecorded or not-currently-recorded information (a request for advice, interpretation, referral, or research)⁷ made to a public office, rather than a request for a specific, existing document, device, or item containing such information, would fail this part of the definition of a “record.”⁸ A public office has discretion to determine the form in which it will keep its records.⁹

Part 2: “. . . created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office . . .”

It is usually clear when items are created or received by a public office. However, even if an item is not in the public office’s physical possession, it may still be considered a “record” of that office.¹⁰ If records are held or created by another entity that is performing a public function for a public office, those records may be “under the jurisdiction of any public office.”¹¹

Part 3: “. . . which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office.”

In addition to obvious non-records such as junk mail and electronic “spam,” some items found in the possession of a public office do not meet the definition of a record because they do not “document the activities of a public office.”¹² It is the message or content, not the medium on which it exists, that makes a document a record of a public office.¹³ The Supreme Court of Ohio has noted that “disclosure [of non-records] would not help to monitor the conduct of state government.”¹⁴ Some items that have been found not to document the activities, etc., of public offices include public employee home addresses kept by the employer solely for administrative (i.e., management) convenience,¹⁵ retired municipal government employee home addresses kept by the municipal

The Ohio Public Records Act

Chapter One: Public Records Defined

retirement system,¹⁶ mailing lists,¹⁷ personal calendars and appointment books,¹⁸ juror contact information and other juror questionnaire responses,¹⁹ personal information about children who use public recreational facilities,²⁰ personal identifying information in housing authority lead-poisoning documents,²¹ and non-record items and information contained in employee personnel files.²² On the other hand, the names and contact information of some licensees,²³ contractors,²⁴ lessees,²⁵ customers,²⁶ and other non-employees of a public office²⁷ have been found to be “records” when they actually document the formal activities of a particular office. Proprietary software needed to access stored records on magnetic tapes, or other similar format, is a means to provide access, but is not itself, a record because it does not itself document the activities, etc., of a public office.²⁸ Personal correspondence or personal email addresses that do not document any activity of the office are non-records.²⁹ Finally, the Attorney General has opined that a piece of physical evidence in the hands of a prosecuting attorney (e.g., a cigarette butt) is not a record of that office.³⁰

3. The effect of “actual use”

An item received by a public office is not a record simply because the public office *could* use the item to carry out its duties and responsibilities.³¹ However, if the public office *actually* uses the item, it may thereby document the office’s activities and become a record.³² For example, where a school board invited job applicants to send applications to a post office box, any applications received in that post office box did not become records of the office until the board retrieved and reviewed, or otherwise used and relied on them.³³ Personal, otherwise non-record correspondence that is actually used to document a decision to discipline a public employee qualifies as a “record.”³⁴

4. “Is this item a record?” – Some common applications

a. Email

A public office must analyze an email message like any other item—by its *content* or *information*—to determine if it meets the definition of a record. As electronic documents, all emails are items containing information stored on a fixed medium (the first part of the definition). If an email is received by, created by, or comes under the jurisdiction of a public office (the second part of the definition), then its status as a record depends on the content of the message. If an email created by, received by, or coming under the jurisdiction of a public office also serves to document the activities of the public office, then it meets all three parts of the definition of a record.³⁵ If an email does not serve to document the activities of the office, then it does not meet the definition of a record.³⁶

Although the Supreme Court of Ohio has not ruled directly on whether communications of public employees to or from private email accounts, that otherwise meet the definition of a record, are subject to the Public Records Act,³⁷ the Ohio Court of Claims has held that they are.³⁸ The issue is analogous to mailing a record from one’s home, versus mailing it from the office -- the location from which the item is sent does not change its status as a record. Records transmitted via email, like all other records, must be maintained in accordance with the office’s relevant records retention schedules, based on content.³⁹

b. Text messages

Like email messages, a text message may be a public record if the content or information in the message documents the activities of the public office.⁴⁰ The Ohio Court of Claims held that text messages on public employees’ personal phones were public records because the content of the messages documented the activities of the office.⁴¹

c. Notes

Not every piece of paper on which a public official or employee writes something meets the definition of a record.⁴² Personal notes generally do not constitute records.⁴³ Employee notes have been found

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not to be public records if they are kept as personal papers, not official records; kept for the employee's own convenience (for example, to help recall events); and other employees did not use or have access to the notes.⁴⁴

Such personal notes do not meet the third part of the definition of a record because they do not document the activities, etc., of the public office. The Supreme Court has held in several cases that, in the context of a public court hearing or administrative proceeding, personal notes that meet the above criteria need not be retained as records because no information will be lost to the public.⁴⁵ However, if any one of these factors does not apply (for instance, if the notes are shared or used to create official minutes), then the notes are likely to be considered a record.⁴⁶

d. Drafts

If a draft document kept by a public office meets the three-part definition of a record, it is subject to both the Public Records Act and records retention law.⁴⁷ For example, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that a written draft of an oral collective bargaining agreement submitted to a city council for its approval documented the city's version of the oral agreement, and therefore, met the definition of a record.⁴⁸ A public office may address the length of time it must keep drafts through its records retention schedules.⁴⁹

e. Electronic database contents

A database is an organized collection of related data. The Public Records Act does not require a public office to search a database for information and compile or summarize it to create new records.⁵⁰ However, if the public office already uses a computer program that can perform the search and produce the compilation or summary described by the requester, the Supreme Court of Ohio has held that the output already "exists" as a record for the purposes of the Public Records Act.⁵¹ In contrast, where the public office would have to reprogram its computer system to produce the requested output, the Supreme Court held that the public office does not have that output as an existing record of the office.⁵²

f. Metadata

Metadata is defined as "[s]econdary data that organize, manage, and facilitate the use and understanding of primary data."⁵³ Some examples of metadata include, among other things, author, date, version, and GPS information in an electronic document.⁵⁴ Metadata information can be considered a "public record," subject to the Public Records Act. If it "serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office."⁵⁵ A public office is not entitled to produce metadata, unless the requester specifically asks for it.⁵⁶ However, a public office must provide records complete and unaltered, which means that the office cannot deliberately impair records by stripping them of their metadata.⁵⁷ An otherwise identical record may not be considered the same or a duplication if it contains additional metadata information.⁵⁸

B. When is a Record "Kept By" a Public Office?

A record is only a public record if it is "kept by" a public office.⁵⁹ Records that do not yet exist – for example, future minutes of a meeting that has not yet taken place – are not records, much less public records, until actually in existence and "kept by" the public office.⁶⁰ A public office has no duty to furnish records that are not in its possession or control.⁶¹ Similarly, if the office kept a record in the past, but has properly disposed of the record, then it is no longer a record of that office.⁶² For example, where a school board first received and then returned superintendent candidates' application materials to the applicants, those materials were no longer "public records" responsive to a newspaper's request.⁶³ But "so long as a public record is kept by a government agency, it can never lose its status as a public record."⁶⁴ Merely attaching a document to a public record does not

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automatically incorporate that document into the public record – the document must be affirmatively incorporated by making a notation on it referring to the public record to which it is attached.⁶⁵

Emails or text messages stored on personal accounts or devices may be considered “kept by” the public office if the content or information in the messages document the activities of the public office.⁶⁶ The Ohio Court of Claims held that text messages stored on public employees’ personal phones were “kept by” the public office and subject to disclosure because the content of the messages documented the activities of the office.⁶⁷

C. What Is a “Public Office”?

1. Statutory definition – R.C. 149.011(A)

R.C. 149.011(A) defines a “public office” as “any state agency, public institution, political subdivision, or other organized body, office, agency, institution, or entity established by the laws of this state for the exercise of any function of government.”⁶⁸ If any entity meets this definition, it must make its records available under the Public Records Act.⁶⁹ An organization that meets the statutory definition of a “public body” under the Open Meetings Act (see Chapter Eight: A., “Public Body”) does not automatically meet the definition of a “public office” for purposes of the Public Records Act.⁷⁰

This definition includes all state and local government offices, as well as many agencies not directly operated by a political subdivision, such as police departments operated by private universities.⁷¹ Examples of entities that previously have been determined to be “public offices” (prior to the *Oriana House*⁷² decision) include:

- Certain public hospitals and health care providers;⁷³
- Community action agencies;⁷⁴
- Private non-profit water corporations supported by public money;⁷⁵
- Private non-profit PASSPORT administrative agencies;⁷⁶
- Private equity funds that receive public money and are essentially owned by a state agency;⁷⁷
- Non-profit corporations that receive and solicit gifts for a public university and receive support from taxation;⁷⁸
- Private non-profit county ombudsman offices;⁷⁹ and
- County emergency medical services organizations.⁸⁰

2. Private entities can be “public offices”

Private entities can be considered “public offices” and thus subject to the Public Records Act.⁸¹ A private entity may qualify as a public office under the plain language of R.C. 149.011(A).⁸² If a private entity does not qualify as a public office under R.C. 149.011(A), it may be subject to the Public Records Act if there is clear and convincing evidence that a private entity is the “functional equivalent” of a public office.⁸³ Under the functional-equivalency test, a court must analyze: (1) whether the entity performs a governmental function; (2) the level of government funding; (3) the extent of government involvement or regulation; and (4) whether the entity was created by the government to avoid the requirements of the Public Records Act.⁸⁴ The functional-equivalency test “is best suited to the overriding purpose of the Public Records Act, which is ‘to allow public scrutiny of public offices, not of all entities that receive funds that at one time were controlled by the government.’”⁸⁵ In general, the more it can be shown that a private entity is performing a government function, as well as the

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extent to which the entity is funded, controlled, regulated, and/or created by the government, the more likely a court will determine that it is a “public institution,” and therefore, a “public office” subject to the Public Records Act.

3. *Quasi-agency – A private entity, even if not a “public office,” can be “a person responsible for public records”*

When a public office contracts with a private entity to perform government work, the records related to that work may be public records, even if they are solely in the possession of the private entity.⁸⁶ Traditionally, these records were considered public records when three conditions were met: (1) the private entity prepared the records to perform responsibilities normally belonging to the public office; (2) the public office is able to monitor the private entity’s performance; *and* (3) the public office may access the records itself.⁸⁷ The Supreme Court of Ohio recently modified the quasi-agency test, giving more weight to the first prong. Adequate proof of a delegated public duty by itself could establish that the records relating to the delegated functions are public records.⁸⁸ Under these circumstances, the public office is subject to requests for the public records under its jurisdiction, and the private entity itself may have become a “person⁸⁹ responsible for public records”⁹⁰ for purposes of the Public Records Act.⁹¹ For example, a public office’s obligation to turn over application materials and resumes extends to records of private search firms the public office used in the hiring process.⁹² Even if the public office does not have control over or access to such records, the records may still be public.⁹³ A public office cannot avoid its responsibility for public records by transferring custody of records or the record-making function to a private entity.⁹⁴ However, a public office may not be responsible for records of a private entity that performs related functions that are not activities of the public office.⁹⁵ A person who works in a governmental subdivision and discusses a request is not thereby a “person responsible” for records outside of his or her own public office within the governmental subdivision.⁹⁶ Requesters are entitled to records if they can show “the records sought are related to a delegated governmental function.”⁹⁷

4. *Public office is responsible for its own records*

Only a public office or person who is actually responsible for the record sought is responsible for providing inspection or copies.⁹⁸ When statutes impose a duty on a particular official to oversee records, that official is the “person responsible” within the meaning of the Public Records Act.⁹⁹ A requester may wish to avoid any delay by initially asking a public office to whom in the office they should make the public records request, but the courts will construe the Public Records Act liberally in favor of broad access when, for example, the request is served on any member of a committee from which the requester seeks records.¹⁰⁰ The same document may be kept as a record by more than one public office.¹⁰¹ One appellate court has held that one public office may provide responsive documents on behalf of several related public offices that receive the same request and are keeping identical documents as records.¹⁰²

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Notes:

¹ Ohio's state and local government offices follow Ohio's Public Records Act, [R.C. 149.43](#). The federal Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, does not apply to state and local offices. See *State ex rel. O'Shea & Assocs. Co., L.P.A. v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 149, 2012-Ohio-115, ¶ 38.

² [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)](#).

³ *State ex rel. Data Trace Information Servs., L.L.C. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Fiscal Officer*, 131 Ohio St.3d 255, 2012-Ohio-753, ¶ 28-41 (detailing application of the definition of "records" to the electronic records of one public office).

⁴ *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 21 (finding email messages constitute electronic records under R.C. 1306.01(G)); *Sinclair Media III, Inc. v. City of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2623, ¶ 14 ("Ohio courts routinely treat text messages and emails sent by public officials and employees in the same manner as any other records, regardless of whether messages and emails are on publicly-issued or privately-owned devices").

⁵ *State ex rel. Harmon v. Bender*, 25 Ohio St.3d 15, 17 (1986).

⁶ *Sinclair Media III, Inc. v. City of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2623, ¶ 14 ("Ohio courts routinely treat text messages and emails sent by public officials and employees in the same manner as any other records, regardless of whether messages and emails are on publicly-issued or privately-owned devices"); *Cincinnati Enquirer v. City of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01339PQ, 2019-Ohio-1613.

⁷ *State ex rel. Kerner v. State Teachers Retirement Bd.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 273 (1998) (finding that names and documents of a class of persons who were enrolled in the State Teachers Retirement System did not exist in record form); *State ex rel. Lanham v. Ohio Adult Parole Auth.*, 80 Ohio St.3d 425, 427 (1997) (inmate's request for "qualifications of APA members" was a request for information not for specific records); *Wilhelm v. Jerusalem Twp. Zoning*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-008342PQ, 2020-Ohio-5283, ¶ 11, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00342PQ, 2020-Ohio-5282 (requester's questions about a township's records did not identify any specific records); *State ex rel. Griffin v. Sehlmeier*, 167 Ohio St.3d 566, 2022-Ohio-2189, ¶ 11 (inmate's request for "documented records" showing COVID-19 funding was a request for information; requester was specifying the type of information sought not the records he wanted to review).

⁸ *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, 85 Ohio St.3d 153, 154 (1999) (a public office has "no duty under R.C. 149.43 to create new records by searching for and compiling information from existing records"; when requested records of peremptory strikes during relator's trial did not exist, the court had no obligation to create responsive records); *Capers v. White*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 80713, 2002 Ohio App. LEXIS 1962 (Apr. 17, 2002) (requests for information are not enforceable in a public records mandamus action).

⁹ *State ex rel. Recodat Co. v. Buchanan*, 46 Ohio St.3d 163, 164 (1989); *State ex rel. Bardwell v. City of Cleveland*, 126 Ohio St.3d 195, 2010-Ohio-3267, ¶ 4; *State ex rel. Mitchell v. Byrd*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 111205, 2022-Ohio-2700, ¶ 14 (requiring a county clerk of court to provide information and to create new records by searching for and compiling information from existing records is not enforceable in a public records mandamus action).

¹⁰ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654, 660 (2001) (records of costs to build stadium were within jurisdiction of county board and thus public records even if in the possession of the county or the construction companies).

¹¹ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654 (2001).

¹² *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Johnson*, 106 Ohio St.3d 160, 2005-Ohio-4384, ¶ 29 (quotation omitted); *State ex rel. Fant v. Enright*, 66 Ohio St.3d 186, 188 (1993) ("To the extent that any item ... is not a 'record,' i.e., does not serve to document the organization, etc., of the public office, it is not a public record and need not be disclosed.").

¹³ *State ex rel. Margolius v. City of Cleveland*, 62 Ohio St.3d 456, 461 (1992); *Sinclair Media III, Inc. v. City of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2623, ¶ 14 ("Ohio courts routinely treat text messages and emails sent by public officials and employees in the same manner as any other records, regardless of whether messages and emails are on publicly-issued or privately-owned devices").

¹⁴ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Johnson*, 106 Ohio St.3d 160, 2005-Ohio-4384, ¶ 27, citing *State ex rel. McCleary v. Roberts*, 88 Ohio St.3d 365, 369, 2000-Ohio-345 (names, addresses, and other personal information kept by city recreation and parks department regarding children who used city's recreational facilities are not public records).

¹⁵ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Johnson*, 106 Ohio St.3d 160, 2005-Ohio-4384 (home addresses of employees generally do not document activities of the office but may in certain circumstances).

¹⁶ *State ex rel. DeGroot v. Tilsley*, 128 Ohio St.3d 311, 2011-Ohio-231, ¶ 6-8.

¹⁷ *State ex rel. Taxpayers Coalition v. City of Lakewood*, 86 Ohio St.3d 385, 1999-Ohio-114 (city was not required to create mailing list it did not regularly keep in its existing records); *Hicks v. Union Twp.*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2022-10-057, 2023-Ohio-874, ¶ 41 (newsletter mailing distribution list not a public record because it is comprised of "information used as a matter of convenience in distributing the newsletters").

¹⁸ *Internatl. Union, United Auto., Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers v. Voinovich*, 100 Ohio App.3d 372, 378 (10th Dist. 1995). However, work-related calendar entries are manifestly items created by a public office that document the functions, operations, or other activities of the office, and are records. *State ex rel. McCaffrey v. Mahoning Cty. Prosecutor's Office*, 133 Ohio St.3d 139, 2012-Ohio-4246, ¶ 33.

¹⁹ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Bond*, 98 Ohio St.3d 146, 2002-Ohio-7117, ¶ 51; *State v. Carr*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 28193, 2019-Ohio-3802, ¶ 22 (jury verdict forms that contain names of jurors are not public records).

²⁰ *State ex rel. McCleary v. Roberts*, 88 Ohio St.3d 365, 369, 2000-Ohio-345 (2000); [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)\(r\)](#).

²¹ *State ex rel. O'Shea & Assocs. Co., L.P.A. v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 149, 2012-Ohio-115, ¶ 36 (personal identifying information in lead-poisoning documents, such as the names of parents and guardians; social security and telephone numbers; children's names and dates of birth; names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other caregivers; and the names and places of employment of occupants, did not serve to document the CMHA's functions or other activities).

²² *State ex rel. Fant v. Enright*, 66 Ohio St.3d 186, 188 (1993); *State ex rel. Louisville Edn. Assn v. Louisville City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 5th Dist. Stark No. 2016CA00159, 2017-Ohio-5564, ¶ 4-9 (tax records showing "deductions for tax sheltered accounts, charitable contributions, and the amount of taxes withheld" does not document the organization or function of the agency and is not public information subject to disclosure); *State ex rel. Community Press v. City of Blue Ash*, 2018-Ohio-2506, ¶ 2, 12 (1st Dist.) (requested peer assessments of managers were only used for "individual development" and not "used" by public office to carry out its duties and responsibilities and accordingly non-records); *Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01032PQ, 2018-Ohio-5015, ¶ 11 (requested records documented optional health insurance choices made by employees and reveal little about the agency's activities).

²³ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Jones-Kelly*, 118 Ohio St.3d 81, 2008-Ohio-1770, ¶ 7 (requiring release of names and addresses of persons certified as foster caregivers); exemption for this information later created by [R.C. 5101.29\(D\)](#), [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)\(y\)](#).

²⁴ *State ex rel. Carr v. City of Akron*, 112 Ohio St.3d 351, 2006-Ohio-6714, ¶ 41-43 (names of fire captain promotional candidates; names, ranks, addresses, and telephone numbers of firefighter assessors; and all documentation on subject-matter experts were records, although a [since-repealed] statutory exemption applied).

²⁵ *State ex rel. Harper v. Muskingum Watershed Conservancy Dist.*, 5th Dist. Tuscarawas No. 2013 AP 06 0024, 2014-Ohio-1222, ¶ 4 (relating to names and addresses of persons leasing property from the Watershed District for any purpose).

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²⁶ 2002 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 030, pp. 9-10 (relating to names and address of a county sewer district's customers); partial exemption later created by R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(aa) (for "[u]sage information including names and addresses of specific residential and commercial customers of a municipally owned or operated public utility").

²⁷ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Daniels*, 108 Ohio St.3d 518, 2006-Ohio-1215, ¶ 14-17 (relating to notices to owners of property as residence of a child [with no information identifying the child] whose blood test indicates an elevated lead level); *Brown v. City of Cleveland*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01426PQ, 2019-Ohio-2627, ¶ 8-10 (home addresses of attendees who were invited to a city councilmember's meeting were public because only residents of particular streets were invited to attend the meeting and vote; residents' phone numbers and email addresses were not public records because they were only used for administrative purposes).

²⁸ *State ex rel. Recodet Co. v. Buchanan*, 46 Ohio St.3d 163, 165 (1989); see *State ex rel. Gambill v. Opperman*, 135 Ohio St.3d 298, 2013-Ohio-761, ¶ 21-25 (data "inextricably intertwined" with exempt proprietary software need not be disclosed).

²⁹ 2014 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 029; *State ex rel. Wilson-Simmons v. Lake Cty. Sheriff's Dept.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 37 (1998); *Brown v. City of Cleveland*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01426PQ, 2019-Ohio-2627, ¶ 8-10 (home addresses of attendees who were invited to a city councilmember's meeting were public because only residents of particular street were invited to attend the meeting and vote; residents' phone numbers and email addresses were not public records because they were only used for administrative purposes); *Hicks v. Union Twp.*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2022-10-057, 2023-Ohio-874, ¶ 34 (newsletter email distribution list is not a public record with no evidence that private citizens' names and email addresses "document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities" of the township).

³⁰ 2007 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 034.

³¹ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Whitmore*, 83 Ohio St.3d 61, 63 (1998); *State ex rel. Community Press v. City of Blue Ash*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-170281, 2018-Ohio-2506, ¶ 2, 12 (requested peer assessments of managers were only used for "individual development" and not by public office to carry out its duties and responsibilities, and thus non-records); *Bollinger v. River Valley Local School Dist.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00368PQ, 2020-Ohio-6637, ¶ 10 ("[i]tems gathered during an investigation, but never used to document any aspect of the investigation, do not qualify as 'records'").

³² *State ex rel. WBNS TV, Inc. v. Dues*, 101 Ohio St.3d 406, 2004-Ohio-1497, ¶ 27 (noting judge's use of redacted information to decide whether to approve settlement); *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Whitmore*, 83 Ohio St.3d 61 (1998) (when judge read unsolicited letters but did not rely on them in sentencing defendant, letters did not serve to document any activity of the public office); *State ex rel. Sensel v. Leone*, 85 Ohio St.3d 152 (1999) (unsolicited letters alleging inappropriate behavior of coach not "records"); *State ex rel. Rhodes v. City of Chillicothe*, 4th Dist. Ross No. 12CA3333, 2013-Ohio-1858, ¶ 28 (images that were not forwarded to city by vendor not public records because city did not use them in performing a governmental function); *Chernin v. Geauga Park Dist.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00922PQ, 2018-Ohio-1579, ¶ 17 (constituent's letters shared by board member during public meeting were public records because they were used "to carry out both the board meeting's function as a forum for public input . . . and to discuss meeting policies and procedures"), *adopted by* Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00922PQ, 2018-Ohio-1717; *Brown v. City of Cleveland*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01426PQ, 2019-Ohio-2627, ¶ 8-10 (home addresses of attendees who were invited to a city councilmember's meeting to be public records because only residents of a particular street were invited to attend the meeting and vote; residents' phone numbers and email addresses were not public records because they were only used for administrative purposes); *State ex rel. Wellin v. City of Hamilton*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00748PQ, 2022-Ohio-2661, ¶ 9 (records involving hydroelectric projects were not records of the city without a showing that particular records actually document its operation); *State ex rel. Ames v. Crestwood Loc. Sch. Dist. Bd. Of Educ.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2023-P-0014, 2023-Ohio-4371, ¶ 31 (mental health survey results were not records because the school district "made no decisions and took no action based on the survey results[.]").

³³ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ronan*, 127 Ohio St.3d 236, 2010-Ohio-5680, ¶ 15-16.

³⁴ *State ex rel. Bowman v. Jackson City School Dist.*, 4th Dist. Jackson No. 10CA3, 2011-Ohio-2228.

³⁵ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253 (public office email can constitute public records under R.C. 149.011(G) and 149.43 if it documents the organization, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the public office); *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 28-32; *State ex rel. Bowman v. Jackson City School Dist.*, 4th Dist. Jackson No. 10CA3, 2011-Ohio-2228 (personal emails on public system are "records" when relied upon for discipline).

³⁶ *State ex rel. Wilson-Simmons v. Lake Cty. Sheriff's Dept.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 37 (1998) (when an email message does not serve to document the organization, functions, policies, procedures, or other activities of the public office, it is not a "record," even if it was created by public employees on a public office's email system).

³⁷ But see *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 23 (when respondent conceded that email messages she created or received in her capacity as state representative document her work-related activities, the messages are public records regardless whether she used her public or her private email account).

³⁸ *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018PQ-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2624, ¶ 5-12.

³⁹ *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 24, fn. 1 ("Our decision in no way restricts a public office from disposing of items, including transient and other documents (e.g., email messages) that are no longer of administrative value and are not otherwise required to be kept, in accordance with the office's properly adopted policy for records retention and disposal. See R.C. 149.351. Nor does our decision suggest that the Public Records Act prohibits a public office from determining the period of time after which its email messages can be routinely deleted as part of the duly adopted records-retention policy.").

⁴⁰ *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018PQ-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2624, ¶ 5-12.

⁴¹ *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018PQ-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2624, ¶ 5-12 (text messages between city council members were public records because the messages discussed firing city manager).

⁴² *Internatl. Union, United Auto., Aerospace & Agricultural Implement v. Voinovich*, 100 Ohio App.3d 372, 376 (10th Dist. 1995) (governor's personal logs, journals, calendars, and appointment books not "records"); *State ex rel. Doe v. Tetrault*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2011-10-070, 2012-Ohio-3879, ¶ 4, 28, 35-38 (scrap paper used by one person to track his hours worked for purposes of entering his hours into report were personal notes and not a record); *State ex rel. Essi v. City of Lakewood*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 104659, 2018-Ohio-5027, ¶ 41 (8th Dist.) (redaction of personal and family appointments before release of work calendar was appropriate).

⁴³ *Hunter v. Ohio Bur. of Workers' Comp.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 13AP-457, 2014-Ohio-5660, ¶ 16-17, 23-35 (investigators' handwritten notes, used to convey information for oral or written reports and then disposed of, were not public records); *State ex rel. Doe v. Tetrault*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2011-10-070, 2012-Ohio-3879, ¶ 38; *State ex rel. Santeafort v. Wayne Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 12th Dist. Butler No. CA2014-070153, 2015-Ohio-2009, ¶ 13, 15 (handwritten notes township fiscal officer took for her own convenience "to serve as a reminder when compiling the official record" were not subject to disclosure even though officer is required by statute to "keep an accurate record" of board proceedings); *M.F. v. Perry Cty. Children Servs.*, 5th Dist. Perry Nos. 19-CA-0003, 19-CA-0004, 2019-Ohio-5435, ¶ 47 (caseworker's personal notes that she shredded when a case closed and which were not entered into agency's database because it would have been duplicate information were not subject to disclosure), *discretionary appeal not allowed*, 158 Ohio St.3d 1488, 2020-Ohio-1634; *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 62-67 (handwritten notes maintained by prosecuting attorney are personal notes and therefore "outside the scope of the Public Records Act."); *Nolan v. Wetzel*, 5th Dist. Morgan No. 22AP0001, 2022-Ohio-4382, ¶ 20 (a judge's personal, handwritten notes made during course of trial are not public records).

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- ⁴⁴ *Barnes v. Columbus*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 10AP-637, 2011-Ohio-2808 (relating to police promotional exam assessors' notes), *discretionary appeal not allowed*, 130 Ohio St.3d 1418; *M.F. v. Perry Cty. Children Servs.*, 5th Dist. Perry Nos. 19-CA-0003, 19-CA-0004, 2019-Ohio-5435, ¶ 47; *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 65-66 (law enforcement officer's personal notes properly withheld and not required to be maintained when kept for his own personal use).
- ⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Cranford v. Cleveland*, 103 Ohio St.3d 196, 2004-Ohio-4884, ¶ 19, superseded by statute as stated in *State ex rel. DiFranco v. City of S. Euclid*, 138 Ohio St.3d 378, 2014-Ohio-539; *State ex rel. Steffan v. Kraft*, 67 Ohio St.3d 439, 440 (1993). Personal notes that are not physically "kept by" the public office, would also not fit that defining requirement of a "public record."
- ⁴⁶ *State ex rel. Verhovec v. Marietta*, 4th Dist. Washington No. 12CA32, 2013-Ohio-5415, ¶ 30 (handwritten notes that are later transcribed are records because city clerk used them not merely as personal notes, but in preparation of official minutes in clerk's official capacity).
- ⁴⁷ *Kish v. City of Akron*, 109 Ohio St.3d 162, 2006-Ohio-1244, ¶ 20 (a "document need not be in final form to meet the statutory definition of 'record'"); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 20 ("[E]ven if a record is not in final form, it may still constitute a 'record' for purposes of R.C. 149.43 if it documents the organization, policies, functions, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of a public office."); *State ex rel. Wadd v. City of Cleveland*, 81 Ohio St.3d 50, 53 (1998) (granting access to preliminary, unnumbered accident reports not yet processed into final form); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Schweikert*, 38 Ohio St.3d 170 (1988) (granting access to preliminary work product that had not reached its final stage or official destination).
- ⁴⁸ *State ex rel. Calvary v. City of Upper Arlington*, 89 Ohio St.3d 229 (2000).
- ⁴⁹ For additional discussion, see Chapter Seven: B. "Records Management – Practical Pointers."
- ⁵⁰ *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, 85 Ohio St.3d 153, 154 (1999); see also *State ex rel. Margolius v. Cleveland*, 62 Ohio St.3d 456 665 (1992); *Kovach v. Geauga Cty. Auditor's Office*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00917PQ, 2019-Ohio-5455, ¶ 10 (auditor properly denied requests seeking explanations or reasons for the execution of public functions and asking for admissions or denials of certain facts); *Isreal v. Franklin Cty. Commrs.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00548PQ, 2019-Ohio-5457, ¶ 8-9.
- ⁵¹ *State ex rel. Scanlon v. Deters*, 45 Ohio St.3d 376, 379 (1989), *overruled on other grounds*, *State ex rel. Steckman v. Jackson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 420 (1994).
- ⁵² *State ex rel. Kerner v. State Teachers Retirement Bd.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 273, 275 (1998) (finding that the agency would have had to reprogram its computers to create the requested names and addresses of a described class of members); but see *Diebert v. Lafferty*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00699PQ, 2022-Ohio-2919, ¶ 29 (rejecting the public office's argument that to comply with the public records request would mean the Village would have to purchase new software because the public office is under a statutory duty to organize and employ its staff in a way that makes public records available for inspection and to provide copies within a reasonable time). A public office, however, is not required to give requesters direct access to electronic databases to inspect records. *State ex rel. Gilreath v. Cuyahoga Job & Family Servs.*, S. Ct. No. 2022-0824, 2024-Ohio-103, ¶ 21.
- ⁵³ *State ex rel. McCaffrey v. Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office*, 133 Ohio St.3d 139, 2012-Ohio-4246, ¶ 19, quoting Black's Law Dictionary 1080 (9th Ed. 2009).
- ⁵⁴ *Parks v. Webb*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00995PQ, 2018-Ohio-1578, ¶ 13.
- ⁵⁵ See, e.g., *Morrison v. Law Dir. of Mt. Vernon*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2022-00023PQ, 2022-Ohio-1617, ¶ 7.
- ⁵⁶ *State ex rel. McCaffrey v. Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office*, 133 Ohio St.3d 139, 145, 2012-Ohio-4246, ¶ 19-21.
- ⁵⁷ *Parks v. Webb*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00995PQ, 2018-Ohio-1578, ¶ 14-17.
- ⁵⁸ *Bello v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00129PQ, 2020-Ohio-4559, ¶ 9.
- ⁵⁹ *State ex rel. Hubbard v. Fuerst*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 94799, 2010-Ohio-2489 (records custodian not required to furnish records not in his possession or control); *State ex rel. Cordell v. Paden*, 156 Ohio St.3d 394, 2019-Ohio-1216, ¶ 9-10 (no duty to provide access to nonexistent records); *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. City of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2623, ¶ 16 (text messages kept on city councilmembers' personal and privately-paid-for devices were "kept by" the public office for purposes of responding to public records request because they were used to conduct public business).
- ⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Gambill v. Opperman*, 135 Ohio St.3d 298, 2013-Ohio-761, ¶ 16 (in responding to request for copies of maps and aerial photographs, a county engineer's office has no duty to create requested records because the public office generates such records by inputting search terms into program).
- ⁶¹ *State ex rel. Striker v. Smith*, 129 Ohio St.3d 168, 2011-Ohio-2878, ¶ 28; *State ex rel. Sinkfield v. Rocco*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 101579, 2014-Ohio-5555, ¶ 6-7.
- ⁶² *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 21-23.
- ⁶³ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati Bd. of Edn.*, 99 Ohio St.3d 6, 2003-Ohio-2260, ¶ 12 (materials related to superintendent search not "public records" when neither board nor search agency kept such materials); *State ex rel. Johnson v. Oberlin City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 9th Dist. Lorain No. 08CA009517, 2009-Ohio-3526 (individual evaluations used by board president to prepare a composite evaluation but not kept thereafter were not "public records").
- ⁶⁴ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 28.
- ⁶⁵ *State ex rel. Fluty v. Raiff*, S. Ct. No. 2021-1250, 2023-Ohio-3285, ¶ 19.
- ⁶⁶ *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018PQ-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2624.
- ⁶⁷ *State ex rel. Sinclair Media v. Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018PQ-01357PQ, 2019-Ohio-2624, (texts messages on public employees' personal phones considered "kept by" the public office when content of messages documents the activities of the office).
- ⁶⁸ R.C. 149.011(A). To clarify, a function of government need not be a "historically government function." *State ex rel. Fair Hous. Opportunities of Nw. Ohio v. Ohio Fair Plan*, 172 Ohio St.3d 149, 2023-Ohio-2667, ¶ 17. JobsOhio, a non-profit corporation formed under R.C. 187.01, is not a public office for purposes of the Public Records Act, pursuant to R.C. 187.03(A) and R.C. 149.011(A).
- ⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Fair Hous. Opportunities of Nw. Ohio v. Ohio Fair Plan*, 172 Ohio St. 3d 149, 2023-Ohio-2667, ¶ 14-29 (Ohio Fair Plan Underwriting Association is a public office because its board of governors, purpose, operation, and regulation thereof, were established by statute, showing a legislative intent that it be considered a public office).
- ⁷⁰ *State ex rel. ACLU of Ohio v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 35-38.
- ⁷¹ *State ex rel. Schiffbauer v. Banaszak*, 142 Ohio St.3d 535, 2015-Ohio-1854, ¶ 12 (holding that the Otterbein University police department is a public office because it "is performing a function that is historically a government function").
- ⁷² *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854. Similar private entities today should be evaluated based on the functional-equivalency test adopted in *Oriana House*.
- ⁷³ *State ex rel. Dist. 1199, Health Care & Social Serv. Union v. Lawrence Cty. Gen. Hosp.*, 83 Ohio St.3d 351, 1998-Ohio-0049 (1998). But see *State ex rel. Stys v. Parma Community Gen. Hosp.*, 93 Ohio St.3d 438 (2001) (particular hospital not a "public office"); *State ex rel. Farley v. McIntosh*, 134 Ohio App.3d 531 (2d Dist. 1998) (court-appointed psychologist not a "public office").
- ⁷⁴ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Economic Opportunity Planning Assn.*, 61 Ohio Misc.2d 631, 582 N.E.2d 59 (Lucas C.P. 1990).
- ⁷⁵ *Sabo v. Hollister Water Assn.*, 4th Dist. Athens No. 93 CA 1582, 1994 Ohio App. LEXIS 33 (Jan. 12, 1994).
- ⁷⁶ 1995 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 001.
- ⁷⁷ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Ohio Bur. of Workers' Comp.*, 106 Ohio St.3d 113, 2005-Ohio-3549 (limited-liability companies organized to receive state-agency contributions were public offices); *State ex rel. Repository v. Nova Behavioral Health, Inc.*, 112 Ohio St.3d 338, 2006-Ohio-6713, ¶ 42.

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⁷⁸ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Univ. of Toledo Found.*, 65 Ohio St.3d 258, 266 (1992).

⁷⁹ *State ex rel. Strothers v. Wertheim*, 80 Ohio St.3d 155 (1997).

⁸⁰ 1999 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 006.

⁸¹ *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854, paragraph one of syllabus; *State ex rel. Fair Hous. Opportunities of Nw. Ohio v. Ohio Fair Plan*, 172 Ohio St.3d 149, 2023-Ohio-2667, ¶ 14-29 (Ohio Fair Plan Underwriting Association is a public office because its board of governors, purpose, operation, and regulation thereof, were established by statute, showing a legislative intent that it be considered a public office).

⁸² *State ex rel. Fair Hous. Opportunities of Nw. Ohio v. Ohio Fair Plan*, 172 Ohio St. 3d 149, 2023-Ohio-2667, ¶ 14-29 (Ohio Fair Plan Underwriting Association is a public office because its board of governors, purpose, operation, and regulation thereof, were established by statute, showing a legislative intent that it be considered a public office).

⁸³ *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854, paragraph one of syllabus; *State ex rel. ACLU of Ohio, Inc. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. Commrs.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 51 (private groups were not functional equivalent of public office when groups were comprised of unpaid, unguided county leaders and citizens, not created by governmental agency, and submitted recommendations as coalitions of private citizens); *Sheil v. Horton*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 107329, 2018-Ohio-5240, ¶ 17-42 (community college foundation is the functional equivalent of a public office because fundraising is a traditional function of the office); *State ex rel. WTOL Television, L.L.C. v. Cedar Fair, L.P.*, Slip. Op. No. 2022-0914, 2023-Ohio-4593 (Cedar Point Police Department is the functional equivalent of a public office; although it receives little or no government funding, law enforcement and police protection services are government functions and city regulates and is involved with the department; *but see State ex rel. Fair Hous. Opportunities of Nw. Ohio v. Ohio Fair Plan*, 172 Ohio St. 3d 149, 2023-Ohio-2667, ¶ 14-29 (Ohio Fair Plan Underwriting Association is a public office because its board of governors, purpose, operation, and regulation thereof, were established by statute, showing a legislative intent that it be considered a public office)).

⁸⁴ *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854, paragraphs one and two of syllabus.

⁸⁵ *State ex rel. Repository v. Nova Behavioral Health, Inc.*, 112 Ohio St.3d 338, 2006-Ohio-6713, ¶ 24; *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854, ¶ 36 (“It ought to be difficult for someone to compel a private entity to adhere to the dictates of the Public Records Act, which was designed by the General Assembly to allow public scrutiny of public offices, not of all entities that receive funds that at one time were controlled by the government.”); *State ex rel. Bell v. Brooks*, 130 Ohio St.3d 87, 2011-Ohio-4897, ¶ 15-29 (joint self-insurance pool for counties and county governments is not the functional equivalent of a public office); *see also State ex rel. Dayton Tea Party v. Ohio Mun. League*, 129 Ohio St.3d 1471, 2011-Ohio-4751 (granting a motion to dismiss without opinion, based on the argument that the Ohio Municipal League and Township Association were not the functional equivalents of public offices); *State ex rel. Dist. Eight Regional Org. Comm. v. Cincinnati-Hamilton Cty. Cmty. Action Agency*, 192 Ohio App.3d 553, 2011-Ohio-312 (1st Dist.) (home weatherization program administered by private non-profit community action agency is not the functional equivalent of public office); *State ex rel. Luken v. Corp. for Findlay Mkt. of Cincinnati*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. C-100437, 2012-Ohio-2074, ¶ 27 (non-profit corporation that manages the operation of a public market is not the functional equivalent of a public office); *State ex rel. Hurt v. Liberty Twp.*, 2017-Ohio-7820, ¶ 42 (5th Dist.) (investigator was the functional equivalent of a public office because he was performing a governmental function and was paid by the township with public tax dollars); *State ex rel. Schutte v. Gorman Heritage Found.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01029PQ, 2019-Ohio-1818 (foundation that operated a working farm is the functional equivalent of a public office because foundation provided a service akin to a public park on government land, and received a significant level of funding from a village that played a key role in its creation).

⁸⁶ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654, 660; *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 76 Ohio St.3d 1224 (1996); *State ex rel. Armatas v. Plain Twp.*, 163 Ohio St.3d 304, 2021-Ohio-1176, ¶ 14 (applying quasi-agency test to hold that private law firm to which township delegated legal work was a “person responsible” for public records).

⁸⁷ *State ex rel. Carr v. City of Akron*, 112 Ohio St.3d 351, 2006-Ohio-6714, ¶ 37 (finding that firefighter promotional examinations kept by testing contractor were still public records); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654, 657. *But see State ex rel. Am. Civ. Liberties Union of Ohio v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. Commrs.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 52-54 (quasi-agency theory did not apply when private citizen group submitted recommendations but owed no duty to government office to do so).

⁸⁸ *State ex rel. Ames v. Baker, Dublikar, Beck, Wiley & Mathews*, 170 Ohio St.3d 239, 2022-Ohio-3990, ¶ 7 (applying a modified version of the quasi-agency test and holding that when a requester has adequately proved the first prong of the quasi-agency test, the requester has met his burden of proving that a delegated public duty establishes that the documents relating to the delegated functions are public records).

⁸⁹ The legal definition of “person” “includes an individual, corporation, business trust, estate, trust, partnership, and association.” R.C. 1.59(C).

⁹⁰ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Ohio Bur. of Workers’ Comp.*, 106 Ohio St.3d 113, 2005-Ohio-3549, ¶ 20 (“R.C. 149.43(C) permits a mandamus action against either ‘a public office or the person responsible for the public record’ to compel compliance with the Public Records Act. This provision ‘manifests an intent to afford access to public records, even when a private entity is responsible for the records.’”); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654, 658 (2001); *State ex rel. Dist. Eight Regional Org. Comm. v. Cincinnati-Hamilton Cty. Cmty. Action Agency*, 192 Ohio App.3d 553, 2011-Ohio-312 (1st Dist.) (home weatherization program administered by private non-profit community action agency is not a person responsible for public records); *State ex rel. Doe v. Tetrault*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2011-10-070, 2012-Ohio-3879, ¶ 26 (township employee who tracked hours on online management website and then submitted those hours was not “particular official” charged with duty to oversee public records and cannot be the “person responsible” for the records requested under R.C. 149.43”); *State ex rel. Am. Ctr. for Econ. Equal. v. Jackson*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 102298, 2015-Ohio-4981, ¶ 33 (8th Dist.) (private company that entered into contract with city to conduct study and make recommendations to ensure equal opportunities for minorities is a person responsible for records); *State ex rel. Sheil v. Horton*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 107329, 2018-Ohio-5240, ¶ 17-42 (community college foundation met the elements to qualify as a “person responsible for records” of community college, but concluded this issue moot).

⁹¹ See, e.g., R.C. 149.43(B)(1)-(9), (C)(1), (C)(2).

⁹² *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400, 403-404 (1997); *State ex rel. Carr v. Akron*, 112 Ohio St.3d 351, 2006-Ohio-6714, ¶ 36-37; for additional discussion, see Chapter Five: A. “Employment Records.”

⁹³ *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400, 402-03 (1997) (finding that, despite a lack of proof of public office’s ability to access search firm’s records or monitor performance, requested resumes were still public records).

⁹⁴ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Krings*, 93 Ohio St.3d 654, 659 (2001); *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400, 403 (1997).

⁹⁵ *State ex rel. Rittner v. Foley*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-08-1328, 2009-Ohio-520 (finding school system not responsible for alumni rosters kept only by private alumni organizations); *State ex rel. Hurt v. Liberty Twp.*, 2017-Ohio-7820, ¶ 51 (5th Dist.) (investigator was “a person responsible for records” because he was performing a governmental function and was even paid by the township with public tax dollars).

⁹⁶ *State ex rel. Keating v. Skeldon*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-08-1414, 2009-Ohio-2052 (assistant prosecutor and county public affairs liaison not “persons responsible” for records of county dog warden).

⁹⁷ *Geauga Cty. Prosecutor’s Office v. Munson Fire Dept.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2023-00502PQ, 2023-Ohio-3958, ¶ 34 (when nonprofit corporation contracted with township to perform fire protection and emergency services, quasi-agency test satisfied because the records sought, documents pertaining to the compensation to individuals who provide fire protection, relate to a government function).

⁹⁸ *Cvijetinovic v. Cuyahoga Cty. Aud.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 96055, 2011-Ohio-1754.

⁹⁹ *State ex rel. MADD v. Gosser*, 20 Ohio St.3d 30 (1985), paragraph two of the syllabus.

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¹⁰⁰ *State ex rel. ACLU of Ohio v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. Commrs.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 33-34.

¹⁰¹ *State v. Sanchez*, 79 Ohio App.3d 133, 136 (6th Dist. 1992).

¹⁰² *State ex rel. Cushion v. Massillon*, 5th Dist. Stark No. 2010CA00199, 2011-Ohio-4749, ¶ 81-86.

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Chapter Two: Requesting Public Records

II. Chapter Two: Requesting Public Records

The Public Records Act sets out procedures, limits, and requirements designed to maximize requester success in obtaining access to public records and to minimize the burden on public offices when possible. When making or responding to a public records request, it is important to be familiar with these statutory provisions to achieve a cooperative, efficient, and satisfactory outcome.

A. Rights and Obligations of Public Records Requesters and Public Offices

Every public office must organize and maintain public records in a manner that they can be made available in response to public records requests. A public office must also maintain copies of its current records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public.

Any person can make a request for public records by asking a public office or person responsible for public records for specific, existing records. The requester may make a request in any manner the requester chooses: by phone, in-person, or in an email or letter. A public office cannot require the requester to identify themselves or indicate why they are requesting the records unless a specific law permits or requires it. Often, however, a discussion about the requester's purpose or interest in seeking certain information can aid the public office in locating and producing the desired records more efficiently.

Upon receiving a request to inspect specific, existing public records, a public office must provide prompt inspection at no cost during regular business hours. Upon receiving a request for copies of specific, existing public records, a public office must provide copies within a reasonable period of time. The public office may charge the requester the actual cost of copies made and may require payment of copying costs in advance. The public office may withhold or redact specific records that are covered by an exemption to the Public Records Act but is required to give the requester an explanation, including legal authority, for each denial. The Public Records Act requires negotiation and clarification to help identify, locate, and deliver requested records if a requester makes an ambiguous or overly broad request. Similarly, if the public office believes that asking for a request in writing, asking for the requester's identity, or asking for the intended use of the requested information would enhance the ability of the public office to provide the records, it may ask for the information (though the requester is not required to provide it, and must be informed as such).

1. Organization and maintenance of public records

"To facilitate broader access to public records, a public office ... shall organize and maintain public records in a manner that they can be made available for inspection or copying" in response to public records requests.¹⁰³ The fact that the office uses an organizational system that is different from, or inconsistent with, the form of a given request does not mean that the public office has violated this duty.¹⁰⁴ For example, if a person requests copies of all police service calls for a particular geographical area identified by street names, but the office does not maintain its service call records according to geographical area or street name, the office does not have a duty to fulfill that request.¹⁰⁵ The Public Records Act does not require a public office or person responsible for public records to post its public records on the office's website¹⁰⁶ (but doing so may reduce the number of public records requests the office receives for posted records). A public office is not required to create new records to respond to a public records request, even if it is only a matter of compiling information from existing records.¹⁰⁷

A public office must have copies of its current records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public.¹⁰⁸ It may be worthwhile for a requester to review a public office's records retention schedules to see how the office organizes its records before making a public records request. Referring requesters to retention schedules can also be a useful way for public offices to explain how the office organizes and maintains its records.

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2. “Any person” may make a request

Any person can make a public records request. The requesting “person” need not be an Ohio or United States resident. In fact, in the absence of a specific law to the contrary, foreign individuals and entities domiciled in a foreign country are entitled to inspect and copy public records.¹⁰⁹ The requester need not be an individual, but may be a corporation, trust, or other body.¹¹⁰

3. The request must be for the public office’s existing records

The proper subject of a public records request is a *record* that exists at the time of the request.¹¹¹ Records may not exist if the public office properly disposed of the records pursuant to a records retention schedule.¹¹²

The office need not conduct a search for and retrieve records that contain described information that is of interest to the requester.¹¹³ A public office is also not required to create new records to respond to a public records request, even if it is only a matter of compiling information from existing records.¹¹⁴ For example, if a person asks a public office for a list of court cases pending against it, but the office does not keep such a list, the public office is under no duty to create a list to respond to the request.¹¹⁵ Additionally, there is no duty to provide records that were not in existence at the time of the request¹¹⁶ or that the public office does not possess,¹¹⁷ including records that later come into existence.¹¹⁸

If a public office has a legal duty to maintain a requested record, but the public office fails to do so, the Public Records Act does not provide relief. The Act requires public offices to provide access to specific and existing records, not records that *should exist*.¹¹⁹

4. A request must be specific enough for the public office to reasonably identify responsive records

A requester must identify the records he or she is seeking “with reasonable clarity,”¹²⁰ so that the public office can identify responsive records based on the manner in which it ordinarily maintains and accesses the public records it keeps.¹²¹ The request must fairly and specifically describe what the requester is seeking.¹²² A court will not compel a public office to produce public records when the underlying request is ambiguous or overly broad, or the requester has difficulty making a request such that the public office cannot reasonably identify what public records are being requested.¹²³

5. Overly broad or ambiguous requests

If a requester does not describe the records he or she is seeking “with reasonable clarity,” the request might be considered overly broad or ambiguous, and the public office can deny the request. A request can be overly broad if it is so over-inclusive that the public office is unable to identify the records sought based on the way the office routinely organizes and accesses records. An ambiguous request is one that lacks the clarity a public office needs to determine what the requester is seeking and where to look for records that might be responsive, and/or when the wording of the request is vague or subject to interpretation.

Whether a request is overly broad or ambiguous will depend on the facts and circumstances of the request and courts will look at several factors to decide if a public office properly denied a request on this basis. Courts have found that requests are overly broad when the requests sought:

- All records containing certain names or words;¹²⁴
- A complete duplication of all records having to do with a particular topic, or all records of a particular type;¹²⁵

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- Every report filed with the public office for a particular time period (if the office does not organize records in that manner);¹²⁶ and
- Discovery-style requests that seek all records relating to or reflecting certain types of information.¹²⁷

Requesters may seek “all emails” of a public office. Requesters may limit the request to “all emails” between certain senders and recipients, “all emails” within a certain timeframe, or “all emails” with certain keywords. Whether these requests are overly broad depends upon the facts and circumstances of the request and must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis.¹²⁸ A public office cannot, for example, categorically deny a request for “all emails” between two employees because the requester did not provide search terms.¹²⁹

A public office waives its ability to assert in litigation that a request is overly broad if the public office failed to deny the request as overly broad when first responding to it.¹³⁰

6. Denying, and then clarifying, an ambiguous or overly broad request

A public office may deny any part of a public records request that is ambiguous or overly broad, as defined above. However, the Public Records Act requires that the public office give the requester the opportunity to revise the denied request, by informing the requester how the office ordinarily maintains and accesses its records.¹³¹ In this way, the Public Records Act expressly promotes cooperation to clarify and narrow requests that are ambiguous or overly broad, to craft a successful, revised request.

The public office can inform the requester how the office ordinarily maintains and accesses records through a verbal or written explanation.¹³² Giving the requester a copy of the public office’s relevant records retention schedules can be a helpful starting point in explaining the office’s records organization and access.¹³³ Retention schedules categorize records based on how they are used and the purpose they serve, and well-drafted schedules provide details of record subcategories, content, and duration, all of which can help a requester revise and narrow the request. Ohio courts look favorably at an office’s invitation to discuss revision of an overly broad request as evidence supporting compliance with the Public Records Act.¹³⁴

7. Unless a specific law provides otherwise, requests can be for any purpose, and need not identify the requester or be made in writing

A public records request does not need to be in writing or identify the person making the request.¹³⁵ If the request is verbal, it is recommended that the public employee receiving the request write down the complete request and confirm the wording with the requester to ensure accuracy. In most circumstances, the Public Records Act does not require that a requester specify the reason for the request¹³⁶ or use specific words or language to make a request.¹³⁷ Any requirement by the public office that the requester disclose his or her identity or the intended use of the requested public record constitutes a denial of the request.¹³⁸

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8. Optional negotiation when identity, purpose, or request in writing would assist identifying, locating, or delivering requested records

If a public office believes that (1) having a request in writing, (2) knowing the intended use of the information, or (3) knowing the requester's identity would benefit the requester by enhancing the ability of the public office to identify, locate, or deliver the requested records, the public office may ask if the requester is willing to provide that information to assist the public office in fulfilling the request.¹³⁹ However, the public office must first inform the requester that giving this information is not mandatory. As with the negotiation required for an ambiguous or overly broad request, this optional negotiation tool regarding purpose, identity, or writing can promote cooperation and efficiency. *Reminder:* Before asking for the information, the public office must let a requester know that he or she may decline to share the information.

9. Requester can choose media on which copies are made

A requester may specify whether he or she would like to inspect the records or obtain copies.¹⁴⁰ If the requester asks for copies, he or she has the right to choose the copy medium (paper, film, electronic file, etc.).¹⁴¹ The requester can choose to have the record copied: (1) on paper, (2) in the same medium as the public office keeps them,¹⁴² or (3) on any medium upon which the public office or person responsible for the public records determines the record "reasonably can be duplicated as an integral part of the normal operations of the public office."¹⁴³ The public office may charge the requester the actual cost of copies made and may require payment of copying costs in advance.¹⁴⁴

10. Requester can choose pick-up, delivery, or transmission of copies; public office may charge delivery costs

A requester may personally pick up copies of requested public records or may send a designee.¹⁴⁵ Upon request, a public office must transmit copies of public records via the U.S. mail "or by any other means of delivery or transmission," at the choice of the requester.¹⁴⁶ Although a public office has no duty to post public records online, if a requester lists posting on the office's website as a satisfactory alternative to providing copies, then the public office has complied when it posts the requested records online.¹⁴⁷ Posting records online, however, does not satisfy a request for copies of those records.¹⁴⁸ The public office may require prepayment of postage or other actual delivery costs, as well as the actual cost of supplies used in mailing, delivery, or transmission.¹⁴⁹ (See paragraph 12 below for "costs" detail).

11. Prompt inspection, or copies within a reasonable period of time

There is no predetermined time for responding to a public records request. If the requester wants to inspect records, the records must be "promptly" prepared for inspection,¹⁵⁰ which has been interpreted by the courts as being "without delay" and "with reasonable speed."¹⁵¹ If the requester wants copies of records, the public office must produce the records in a "reasonable period of time."¹⁵² The reasonableness of the response time depends on the facts and circumstances of the particular request.¹⁵³ These terms do not mean "immediately," or "without a moment's delay,"¹⁵⁴ but the courts will find a violation of this requirement when an office cannot show that the response time was reasonable.¹⁵⁵ Time spent on the following response tasks may factor in what is "prompt" or "reasonable" under the circumstances:

- Identification of responsive records: the time it takes to clarify or revise request,¹⁵⁶ or identify records.¹⁵⁷
- Location and retrieval: the time it takes to locate records¹⁵⁸ and retrieve from storage location (e.g., file cabinet, branch office, off-site storage facility, etc.).

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- Review, analysis, and redaction: the time it takes to examine all materials for possible release,¹⁵⁹ perform necessary legal review¹⁶⁰ or consult with knowledgeable parties, redact exempt materials,¹⁶¹ or provide explanation and legal authority for all redactions and/or denials.¹⁶²
- Preparation: the time it takes to obtain requester's choice of medium¹⁶³ or make copies.¹⁶⁴
- Delivery: the time it takes to wait for advance payment of costs,¹⁶⁵ or deliver copies or schedule inspection.¹⁶⁶

The Supreme Court of Ohio has held that “[n]o pleading of too much expense, or too much time involved, or too much interference with normal duties, can be used by the [public office] to evade the public’s right to inspect and obtain a copy of public records within a reasonable time.”¹⁶⁷

12. *Inspection at no cost during regular business hours*

A public office must make its public records available for inspection at all reasonable times during regular business hours.¹⁶⁸ “Regular business hours” means established business hours.¹⁶⁹ When a public office operates twenty-four hours a day, such as a police department, the office may adopt hours that approximate normal administrative hours during which inspection may be provided.¹⁷⁰ Public offices may not charge requesters for inspection of public records.¹⁷¹ Requesters are not required to inspect the records themselves; they may designate someone to inspect the requested records.¹⁷²

A public office is required to make its records available for inspection only at the place where they are stored.¹⁷³ A request to inspect records does not give the requester a right to directly access the public office’s computer systems or databases. Rather, a public office may prepare the records for inspection outside their native electronic format.¹⁷⁴ Posting records online is one means of providing them for inspection -- the public office may not charge a fee just because a person could use their own equipment to print or otherwise download a record posted online.¹⁷⁵

13. *Copies, and delivery or transmission, “at cost”*

A public office may charge for copies and/or for delivery or transmission, and it may require payment of both costs in advance.¹⁷⁶ “At cost” includes the actual cost of making copies,¹⁷⁷ packaging, postage, and any other costs of the method of delivery or transmission chosen by the requester.¹⁷⁸ The cost of employee time cannot be included in the cost of copies or of delivery.¹⁷⁹ A public office may choose to employ the services, and charge the requester the costs of, a private contractor to copy public records so long as the decision to do so is reasonable.¹⁸⁰

When a statute sets the cost of certain records or for certain requesters, the specific statute takes precedence over the general, and the requester must pay the cost set by the statute.¹⁸¹ For example, because R.C. 2301.24 requires that parties to a common pleas court action must pay court reporters the compensation rate set by the judges for court transcripts, a requester who is a party to the action may not use R.C. 149.43(B)(1) to obtain copies of the transcript at the actual cost of duplication.¹⁸² However, when a statute sets a fee for certified copies of an otherwise public record, and the requester does not request that the copies be certified, the office may only charge actual cost.¹⁸³ Similarly, when a statute sets a fee for “photocopies” and the request is for electronic copies rather than photocopies, the office may only charge actual cost.¹⁸⁴

There is no obligation to provide free copies to someone who indicates an inability or unwillingness to pay for requested records.¹⁸⁵ However, before a public office is permitted to deny a request for failure to pay the actual cost of the copies, the public office must first inform the requester of the amount that must be paid.¹⁸⁶ The Public Records Act neither requires a public office to allow those

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seeking a copy of the public record to make copies with their own equipment¹⁸⁷ nor prohibits the public office from allowing this.

14. What responsive records can the public office withhold?

a. Records subject to an exemption

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, “Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records,” there are numerous exemptions in the law that either prohibit the release of public records (“mandatory exemptions”) or give the public office the option to either withhold or release the record (“discretionary exemptions”).

b. No duty to release non-records

Items are “public records” if they document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the public office.¹⁸⁸ If an item does not meet that definition, it is not a “record” that the public office must disclose.¹⁸⁹ The Supreme Court of Ohio expressly rejected the notion that an item is a “record” simply because the public office *could* use the item to carry out its duties and responsibilities.¹⁹⁰ Instead, the public office must actually use the item; otherwise, it is not a record.¹⁹¹ The Public Records Act itself does not *restrict* a public office from releasing non-records, but other laws may prohibit a public office from releasing certain information in non-records.¹⁹²

15. Denial of a request, redaction, and a public office’s duties of notice

Both the withholding of an entire record and the redaction of any part of a record are considered a denial of the request to inspect or copy that particular item.¹⁹³ The Public Records Act states that, “[a] redaction shall be deemed a denial of a request to inspect or copy the redacted information, except if a federal or state law authorizes or requires a public office to make the redaction.”¹⁹⁴

Any requirement by the public office that the requester disclose the requester’s identity, or the intended use of the requested public record also constitutes a denial of the request.¹⁹⁵

a. Redaction – statutory definition

“Redaction” means obscuring or deleting any information that is exempt from the duty to permit public inspection or copying from an item that otherwise meets the definition of a “record.”¹⁹⁶ For records on paper, redaction is the blacking out of non-public information in an otherwise public document. A public office may redact audio, video, and other electronic records by processes that obscure or delete specific content.

b. Withholding records or producing records with redactions

“If a public record contains information that is exempt from the duty to permit public inspection or to copy the public record, the public office or the person responsible for the public record shall make available all of the information within the public record that is not exempt.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, a public office may redact only that part of a record subject to an exemption or other valid basis for withholding.

However, an office may withhold an entire record when exempted information is “inextricably intertwined” with the entire content of a particular record such that redaction cannot protect the exempted information.¹⁹⁸ Whether a record contains exempted information that is “inextricably intertwined” with non-exempted information must be determined on a record-by-record basis.¹⁹⁹

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c. Requirement to notify of and explain redactions and withholding of records

Public offices must either “notify the requester of any redaction or make the redaction plainly visible.”²⁰⁰ In addition, if an office denies a request in part or in whole, the public office must “provide the requester with an explanation, including legal authority, setting forth why the request was denied.”²⁰¹ If the requester made the initial request in writing, then the office must also provide its explanation for the denial in writing.²⁰²

d. No obligation to respond to duplicate request

When a public office responds to a request, and the requester sends a follow-up letter reiterating a request for essentially the same records, the public office is not required to provide an additional response.²⁰³

e. No waiver of unasserted, applicable exemptions except claim that request is overly broad or ambiguous

If the requester later files a mandamus action against the public office, the public office is not limited to the explanation(s) previously given for denial but may rely on additional reasons or legal authority in defending the action.²⁰⁴ This rule does not apply to overly broad requests, however. That is, a public office cannot assert that a request is overly broad for the first time in litigation.²⁰⁵

16. Burden or expense of compliance

A public office cannot deny or delay response to a public records request on the grounds that responding will interfere with the operation of the public office.²⁰⁶ However, when a request to inspect records unreasonably interferes with the discharge of the public office’s duties, the office may not be obligated to comply.²⁰⁷ For example, public offices are not required to permit in-person inspection of public records if the requester is an inmate and doing so would “create[] security issues, unreasonably interfere[] with the officials’ discharge of their duties, and violate[] prison rules.”²⁰⁸

B. Statutes that Modify General Rights and Duties

Through legislation, the General Assembly can change the preceding rights and duties for specific records, for specific public offices, for specific requesters, or in specific situations. Below are a few examples of modifications to the general rules.

1. Specific records

- Although most DNA records kept by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI) are protected from disclosure by exemptions,²⁰⁹ Ohio law requires that the results of DNA testing of an inmate who obtains post-conviction testing must be disclosed to any requester,²¹⁰ which would include results of testing conducted by BCI.
- Certain Ohio sex offender records must be posted on a public website without waiting for an individual public records request.²¹¹
- Ohio law specifies that a public office’s release of an “infrastructure record” or “security record” to a private business for certain purposes does not waive these exemptions,²¹² despite the general rule that voluntary release to a member of the public waives any exemption(s).²¹³

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- Contracts and financial records of moneys expended in relation to services provided under those contracts to federal, state, or local government by another governmental entity or agency, or by most nonprofit corporations or associations, shall be deemed to be public records, except as otherwise provided by R.C. 149.431.²¹⁴

2. Specific public offices

- The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles is authorized to charge a non-refundable fee of four dollars for each highway patrol accident report for which it receives a request;²¹⁵ a coroner's office may charge a record retrieval and copying fee of twenty-five cents per page, with a minimum charge of one dollar,²¹⁶ despite the general requirement that a public office may only charge the "actual cost" of copies.²¹⁷
- The case records and administrative records of Ohio courts of common pleas, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court of Ohio, are not subject to the Public Records Act. Rather, these courts apply the records access rules of the Rules of Superintendence of the Courts of Ohio.²¹⁸
- Information in a competitive sealed proposal and bid submitted to a county contracting authority becomes a public record subject to inspection and copying only *after* the contract is awarded. After the bid is opened by the contracting authority, any information that is subject to an exemption set out in the Public Records Act may be redacted by the contracting authority before the record is made public.²¹⁹

3. Specific requesters or purposes

- Directory information concerning public school students may not be released if the intended use is for a profit-making plan or activity.²²⁰
- Incarcerated persons, commercial requesters, and journalists are subject to combinations of modified rights and obligations, discussed below.

4. Modified records access for certain requesters

The rights and obligations of the following requesters differ from those generally provided by the Public Records Act. Some are required to disclose the intended use of the records or motive behind the request. Others may be required to provide more information or make the request in a specific fashion. Some requesters are given greater access to records than other requesters, and some are more restricted. These are only examples. Be sure to check for any current law modifying access to the specific public records with which you are concerned.

a. Prison inmates

Prison inmates may request public records must follow a statutorily mandated process if requesting records concerning any criminal investigation or prosecution, or a juvenile delinquency investigation that otherwise would be a criminal investigation or prosecution if the subject were an adult.²²¹ Refer to Chapter Four: F. "Modified Access to Records for Prison Inmates," for more detailed discussion on this requirement.

b. Commercial requesters

Unless a specific statute provides otherwise,²²² it is irrelevant whether the intended use of requested records is for commercial purposes.²²³ However, if an individual or entity is making public records requests for commercial purposes, the public office receiving the requests can limit the number of

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records “that the office will physically deliver by United States mail or by another delivery service to ten per month.”²²⁴

For purposes of this limitation, the term “commercial purposes”²²⁵ is to be narrowly construed and does not include the following activities: reporting or gathering news; reporting or gathering information to assist citizen oversight or understanding of the operation or activities of government; or nonprofit educational research.²²⁶

c. Journalists

Several statutes grant “journalists”²²⁷ enhanced access to certain records that are not available to other requesters. This enhanced access is sometimes conditioned on the journalist providing information or representations not normally required of a requester.

Specifically, the journalist must: (1) make the request in writing and sign the request; (2) identify himself or herself by name, title, and employer’s name and address; and (3) state that disclosure of the information sought would be in the public interest.²²⁸

Journalist Requests

Type of Request	ORC Section	Requester May:
Actual personal residential address of a “designated public service worker,” which includes: A peace officer, parole officer, probation officer, bailiff, prosecuting attorney, assistant prosecuting attorney, correctional employee, county or multicounty corrections officer, community-based correctional facility employee, designated Ohio national guard member, protective services worker, youth services employee, firefighter, EMT, medical director or member of a cooperating physician advisory board of an emergency medical service organization, state board of pharmacy employee, investigator of the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, emergency service telecommunicator, forensic mental health provider, mental health evaluation provider, regional psychiatric hospital employee, judge, magistrate, or federal law enforcement officer.	149.43(B)(9)(a)	Inspect or copy the record(s)
Employer name and address, if the employer is a public office, of a spouse, former spouse, or child of a “designated public service worker” (see definition above).	149.43(B)(9)(a)	Inspect or copy the record(s)
Customer information maintained by a municipally owned or operated public utility, other than: • Social security numbers; • Private financial information such as credit reports, payment methods, credit card numbers, and bank account information.	149.43(B)(9)(b)(i)	Inspect or copy the record(s)

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<i>Type of Request</i>	<i>ORC Section</i>	<i>Requester May:</i>
Information about minors involved in a school vehicle accident, other than personal information as defined in R.C. 149.45.	149.43(B)(9)(b)(ii)	Inspect or copy the record(s)
Coroner records, including: - Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes, but not records of a deceased individual that are “confidential law enforcement investigatory records” as defined in R.C. 149.43; - Suicide notes; and - Photographs of the decedent made by the coroner or those directed or supervised by the coroner.	313.10(D)	Inspect the record(s) only, but may <i>not</i> copy them or take notes
Workers’ Compensation initial filings, including addresses and telephone numbers of claimants, regardless of whether their claims are active or closed, and the dependents of those claimants.	4123.88(D)(1)	Inspect or copy the record(s)
Actual confidential personal residential address of a: - Public children services agency employee; - Private child placing agency employee; - Juvenile court employee; - Law enforcement agency employee. Note: the journalist must adequately identify the person whose address is being sought and must make the request to the agency by which the individual is employed or to the agency that has custody of the records.	2151.142(D)	Inspect or copy the record(s)

5. *Modified access to certain public offices’ records*

As with requesters, the rights and obligations of public offices can be modified by law. Some of these modifications impose conditions on obtaining records in volume and setting permissible charges for copying. The following provisions are only examples. The law is subject to change, so be sure to check for any current law modifying access to specific public records with which you are concerned.

a. Bulk commercial requests from Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles

“The bureau of motor vehicles may adopt rules pursuant to Chapter 119 of the Revised Code to reasonably limit the number of bulk commercial special extraction requests made by a person for the same records or for updated records during a calendar year. The rules may include provisions for charges to be made for bulk commercial special extraction requests for the actual cost of the bureau, plus special extraction costs, plus ten percent. The bureau may charge for expenses for redacting information, the release of which is prohibited by law.”²²⁹ The statute sets out definitions of “actual

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cost,” “bulk commercial extraction request,” “commercial,” “special extraction costs,” and “surveys, marketing, solicitation, or resale for commercial purposes.”²³⁰

b. Copies of coroner’s records

Generally, all records of a coroner’s office are public records subject to inspection by the public.²³¹ A coroner’s office may provide copies to a requester upon a written request and payment by the requester of a statutory fee.²³² However, the following are not public records: preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings; photographs of a decedent made by the coroner’s office; suicide notes; medical and psychiatric records of the decedent provided to the coroner; records of a deceased individual that are part of a confidential law enforcement investigatory record; and laboratory reports generated from analysis of physical evidence by the coroner’s laboratory that is discoverable under Ohio Criminal Rule 16.²³³ The following three classes of requesters may request some or all of the records that are otherwise exempted from disclosure: (1) next of kin of the decedent or the representative of the decedent’s estate (copy of full records),²³⁴ (2) journalists (limited right to inspect),²³⁵ and (3) insurers (copy of full records).²³⁶ The coroner may notify the decedent’s next of kin if a journalist or insurer has made a request.²³⁷

C. Go “Above and Beyond” and Negotiate

1. Think outside the box – go above and beyond your duties

Requesters may become impatient with the time a response is taking, and public offices are often concerned with the resources required to process a large or complex request, and either may believe that the other is pushing the limits of the public records laws. These problems can be minimized if one or both parties go above and beyond their duties in search of a result that works for both. Some examples:

- If a request is made for paper copies, and the office keeps the records electronically, the office might offer to email digital copies instead (particularly if this is easier for the office). The requester may not know that the records are kept electronically or that sending by email is cheaper and faster for the requester. The worst that can happen is the requester declines.
- If a requester tells the public office that one part of a request is very urgent for them and the rest can wait, then the office might agree to expedite that part in exchange for relaxed timing for the rest.
- If a township fiscal officer’s ability to copy 500 pages of paper records is limited to a slow ink-jet copier, then either the fiscal officer or the requester might suggest taking the documents to a copy store, where the copying will be faster and likely cheaper.

2. How to find a win-win solution: negotiate

The Public Records Act requires negotiated clarification when an ambiguous or overly broad request is denied and offers optional negotiation when a public office believes that sharing the reason for the request or the identity of the requester would help the office identify, locate, or deliver the records. But negotiation is not limited to these circumstances. If you have a concern or a creative idea, remember that “it never hurts to ask.” If the other party appears frustrated or burdened, ask them, “Is there another way to do this that works better for you?”

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Notes:

- ¹⁰³ R.C. 149.43(B)(2).
- ¹⁰⁴ *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 30 (the Public Records Act “does not expressly require public offices to maintain e-mail records so that they can be retrieved based on sender and recipient status”); *State ex rel. Bardwell v. City of Cleveland*, 126 Ohio St.3d 195, 2010-Ohio-3267, ¶ 5 (when police department kept pawnbroker reports on 3x5 notecards, there was no requirement to adopt a more efficient or updated system).
- ¹⁰⁵ *State ex rel. Evans v. City of Parma*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 81236, 2003-Ohio-1159, ¶ 15.
- ¹⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Patton v. Rhodes*, 129 Ohio St.3d 182, 2011-Ohio-3093, ¶ 15-17.
- ¹⁰⁷ *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, 85 Ohio St.3d 153, 154 (1999); *State ex rel. Griffin v. Sehlmeier*, 166 Ohio St.3d 258, 2021-Ohio-3624, ¶ 5.
- ¹⁰⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(2); for additional discussion, see Chapter Seven: A. “Records Management.”
- ¹⁰⁹ 2006 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 038.
- ¹¹⁰ R.C. 1.59(C); 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 050.
- ¹¹¹ *State ex rel. Taxpayers Coalition v. Lakewood*, 86 Ohio St.3d 385, 389-90 (1999) (no duty to provide records that do not exist).
- ¹¹² *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. Of Commrs.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 23 (when “public records . . . are properly disposed of in accordance with a duly adopted records retention policy, there is no entitlement to these records”).
- ¹¹³ *State ex rel. Kesterson v. Kent State Univ.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 22, 2018-Ohio-5110, ¶ 28-30 (requests for all records regarding employee’s departure from university and restrictions or limitations placed on employee after her departure impermissibly seek information, not specific records); *State ex rel. Griffin v. Sehlmeier*, 167 Ohio St.3d 566, 2022-Ohio-2189, ¶ 3, 11-12 (request for “documented records and or filed on the actual amount of state and/or federal funding that [the public office] has approved to . . . fight COVID-19, at the prison[,]” was a request for information and not a request for specific, existing records).
- ¹¹⁴ *State ex rel. Cioffi v. Stuard*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2009-T-0057, 2010-Ohio-829, ¶ 21-23 (no violation of the Public Records Act when clerk of courts failed to provide a hearing transcript that had never been created); *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, 85 Ohio St.3d 153, 154 (1999) (a public office has no duty “to create new records by searching for and compiling information from existing records”).
- ¹¹⁵ *State ex rel. Fant v. Mengel*, 62 Ohio St.3d 197, 198 (1991) (no duty to create documents to respond to request); *State ex rel. Welden v. Ohio State Med. Bd.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 11AP139, 2011-Ohio-6560, ¶ 9 (because requested list of addresses of every licensed physician did not exist, there was no clear legal duty to create such a record).
- ¹¹⁶ *State ex rel. McCaffrey v. Mahoning Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 133 Ohio St.3d 139, 2012-Ohio-4246, ¶ 22-26.
- ¹¹⁷ *State ex rel. Chatfield v. Gammill*, 132 Ohio St.3d 36, 2012-Ohio-1862, ¶ 3; *State ex rel. Gooden v. Kagel*, 138 Ohio St.3d 343, 2014-Ohio-869, ¶ 5, 8-9 (respondent denied that records had been filed with her, and relator provided no evidence to the contrary).
- ¹¹⁸ *State ex rel. Hogan Lovells U.S., LLP v. Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 56, 2018-Ohio-5133, ¶ 29.
- ¹¹⁹ *Lerussi v. Calcutta Volunteer Fire Dept.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2022-00657PQ, 2023-Ohio-626, ¶ 5.
- ¹²⁰ *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 17.
- ¹²¹ *State ex rel. Morgan v. Strickland*, 121 Ohio St.3d 600, 2009-Ohio-1901, ¶ 18.
- ¹²² *State ex rel. Kesterson v. Kent State Univ.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 22, 2018-Ohio-5110, ¶ 23-30.
- ¹²³ R.C. 149.43(B)(2); *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 19; *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 27, 32.
- ¹²⁴ *State ex rel. Dillery v. Icsman*, 92 Ohio St.3d 312, 314-15 (2001) (request for all records “containing any reference whatsoever” to requester was overly broad); *Kanter v. City of Cleveland Hts.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01092PQ, 2018-Ohio-4592, ¶ 8-12 (request for “all” “communications, messages, schedules, logs, and documents shared” between City of Cleveland Heights and a newspaper “regarding” requester and over a specific date range was overly broad).
- ¹²⁵ *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 20-32 (regarding request for all litigation files and all grievance files for a period over six years, and for all emails between two employees during joint employment); *State ex rel. Dehler v. Spatny*, 127 Ohio St.3d 312, 2010-Ohio-5711, ¶ 1-3 (regarding request for prison quartermaster’s orders and receipts for clothing over seven years); *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 19 (regarding request for all work-related emails, texts, and correspondence of an elected official during six months in office).
- ¹²⁶ *State ex rel. Zauderer v. Joseph*, 62 Ohio App.3d 752, 755 (10th Dist. 1989).
- ¹²⁷ *Paramount Advantage v. Ohio Dept. of Medicaid*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00262PQ, 2021-Ohio-4180, ¶ 19, 21-22 (request for documents “reflecting . . . internal communications” between individuals an overly broad discovery-style request).
- ¹²⁸ *Paramount Advantage v. Ohio Dept. of Medicaid*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00262PQ, 2021-Ohio-4180, ¶ 19, 21-22 (request for documents “reflecting . . . internal communications” between individuals an overly broad discovery-style request).
- ¹²⁹ *State ex rel. Cleveland Assn. of Rescue Employees v. City of Cleveland*, S. Ct. No. 2022-1091, 2023-Ohio-3112, ¶ 24-25.
- ¹³⁰ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 74 (“[P]ermitting a public official to oppose a request as overbroad for the first time in litigation would enable the official to avoid the duty” to negotiate with the requester.).
- ¹³¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(2); *State ex rel. ESPN v. Ohio State Univ.*, 132 Ohio St.3d 212, 2012-Ohio-2690, ¶ 11; *State ex rel. Huth v. Animal Welfare League of Trumbull Cty., Inc.*, 168 Ohio St.3d 574, 2022-Ohio-3583, ¶ 11-12 (in informing requester how the public office maintains and accesses its records, office is not required to explain software and databases to requester); *Wellin v. City of Hamilton*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00748PQ, 2022-Ohio-2661, ¶ 17 (public office failed to inform requester how the office maintained and accessed its records when it merely offered to requester to “contact” the office “[i]f you would like to clarify or revise your request”).
- ¹³² *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 13-16, 33-38 (noting a requester may also possess preexisting knowledge of the public office’s records organization, which helps satisfy this requirement).
- ¹³³ *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 15, 26, 36-37.
- ¹³⁴ *State ex rel. Zidonis v. Columbus State Community College*, 133 Ohio St.3d 122, 2012-Ohio-4228, ¶ 40; *Ziegler v. Ohio Dept. of Pub. Safety*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2014-L-064, 2015-Ohio-139 (“Although repeatedly encouraged by respondent..., relator never revised her request to clarify any of the ambiguities.”).
- ¹³⁵ R.C. 149.43(B)(4), (5).
- ¹³⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(4); see also *State ex rel. Gilbert v. Summit Cty.*, 104 Ohio St.3d 660, 2004-Ohio-7108, ¶ 10 (“[A] person may inspect and copy a ‘public record’ . . . irrespective of his or her purpose for doing so.”); *State ex rel. Consumer News Servs., v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 45 (noting that purpose behind request to “inspect and copy public records is irrelevant”). But see *State ex rel. Keller v. Cox*, 85 Ohio St.3d 279, 1999-Ohio-264 (police officer’s personal information was properly withheld from a criminal defendant who might use the information for “nefarious ends,” implicating constitutional right of privacy). For additional discussion, see Chapter Two: B.4.c. “Journalists.”
- ¹³⁷ *Franklin Cty. Sheriff’s Dept. v. State Emp. Relations Bd.*, 63 Ohio St.3d 498, 504 (1992) (“No specific form of request is required by R.C. 149.43.”).
- ¹³⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(4).
- ¹³⁹ R.C. 149.43(B)(5).
- ¹⁴⁰ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).

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- ¹⁴¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(6); *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Morrow Cty. Prosecutor's Office*, 105 Ohio St.3d 172, 2005-Ohio-685, ¶ 12-13 (public office did not fulfill its duty to provide copies of records by allowing requester to listen to 911 tapes).
- ¹⁴² *State v. Court of Common Pleas*, 7th Dist. Noble No. 07-NO-341, 2007-Ohio-6433, ¶ 30-31 (although direct copies could not be made because the original recording device was no longer available, requester is still entitled to copies in available alternative format).
- ¹⁴³ R.C. 149.43(B)(6); *State ex rel. Reese v. Ohio Dept. Rehab. & Corr. Legal Dept.*, 168 Ohio St.3d 647, 2022-Ohio-2105, ¶ 15-17 (when public office did not maintain requested video footage "in photo clip form," office was not required to produce records in that format).
- ¹⁴⁴ R.C. 149.43(B)(1), (B)(6); *State ex rel. Ware v. City of Akron*, 164 Ohio St.3d 557, 2021-Ohio-624, ¶ 13-15 (a public office complies with the Public Records Act when it identifies the cost of copies and offers to provide copies upon the payment of costs).
- ¹⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Sevayega v. Reis*, 88 Ohio St.3d 458, 459 (2000).
- ¹⁴⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(7).
- ¹⁴⁷ *State ex rel. Patton v Rhodes*, 129 Ohio St.3d 182, 2011-Ohio-3093, ¶ 15-20; 2014 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 009.
- ¹⁴⁸ 2014 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 009.
- ¹⁴⁹ R.C. 149.43(B)(7).
- ¹⁵⁰ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁵¹ *State ex rel. Consumer News Serv., Inc. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 37; see also *State ex rel. Wadd v. Cleveland*, 81 Ohio St.3d 50, 53 (1997).
- ¹⁵² R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁵³ **Reasonable period of time under the facts and circumstances:**
State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Pike Cty. Coroner's Office, 153 Ohio St. 3d 63, 2017-Ohio-8988, ¶ 59 (two months reasonable to produce redacted autopsy reports of homicide victims given "the magnitude of the investigation into the murders and the corresponding need to redact the reports with care"); *State ex rel. Patituce & Assocs., LLC v. City of Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 104837, 2017-Ohio-300, ¶ 10 (delay of almost three months in responding to request for personnel files of police officers and other records was reasonable as requested records potentially contained information prohibited by disclosure); *Strothers v. Norton*, 131 Ohio St.3d 359, 2012-Ohio-1007, ¶ 23 (45 days was reasonable when records responsive to multiple requests were voluminous); *State ex rel. Davis v. Metzger*, 139 Ohio St.3d 423, 2014-Ohio-2329, ¶ 12 (three days was reasonable to respond to records request for the personnel files of six employees).
- Not a reasonable period of time under the facts and circumstances:**
State ex rel. Kesterson v. Kent State Univ., 156 Ohio St.3d 13, 2018-Ohio-5108, ¶ 14-20 (23 days was reasonable to produce over 700 pages of responsive records, but over eight-month delay to produce other responsive records was unreasonable); *State ex rel. Hogan Lovells U.S., LLP v. Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 56, 2018-Ohio-5133, ¶ 33 (ten months to respond to public records request when only explanation is inadvertence "is difficult to defend"); *State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 144 Ohio St.3d 565, 2015-Ohio-4914, ¶ 16, 18 (delay of approximately eight months to provide large amount of records was unreasonable when it "was not primarily due to a review for redaction" but caused by inadvertent omission of records from emails and producing other records before suit was filed); *State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 138 Ohio St.3d 367, 2014-Ohio-538, ¶ 21, *superseded by statute on other grounds* ("It follows that the absence of any response over a two-month period constitutes a violation of the 'obligation in accordance with division (B)' to respond 'within a reasonable period of time' per R.C. 149.43(B)(7)."); *State ex rel. Consumer News Serv., Inc. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 38-47 (six-day delay in providing requested resumes unreasonable).
- ¹⁵⁴ *State ex rel. Montgomery Cty. Pub. Defender v. Siroki*, 108 Ohio St.3d 207, 2006-Ohio-662, ¶ 10.
- ¹⁵⁵ *State ex rel. Consumer News Serv., Inc. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 38-47 (six-day delay in providing requested resumes unreasonable).
- ¹⁵⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(2), (5).
- ¹⁵⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(2), (5).
- ¹⁵⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(5).
- ¹⁵⁹ *State ex rel. Morgan v. Strickland*, 121 Ohio St.3d 600, 2009-Ohio-1901, ¶ 16.
- ¹⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Morgan v. Strickland*, 121 Ohio St.3d 600, 2009-Ohio-1901, ¶ 17.
- ¹⁶¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(1); see *State ex rel. Montgomery Cty. Pub. Defender v. Siroki*, 108 Ohio St.3d 207, 2006-Ohio-662, ¶ 17 (affording clerk of courts time to redact social security numbers from requested records).
- ¹⁶² R.C. 149.43(B)(3).
- ¹⁶³ R.C. 149.43(B)(6).
- ¹⁶⁴ R.C. 149.43(B)(1), (B)(6).
- ¹⁶⁵ R.C. 149.43(B)(6), (B)(7); *State ex rel. Ware v. City of Akron*, 164 Ohio St.3d 557, 2021-Ohio-624, ¶ 13-15 (a public office complies with the Public Records Act when it identifies the cost of copies and offers to provide copies upon the payment of costs).
- ¹⁶⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁶⁷ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Pub. Co. v. Andrews*, 48 Ohio St.2d 283, 289 (1976).
- ¹⁶⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Butler Cty. Bar Assn. v. Robb*, 62 Ohio App.3d 298, 300 (12th Dist. 1990) (rejecting requester's demand that a clerk work certain hours different from the clerk's regularly scheduled hours).
- ¹⁷⁰ *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 622 (1994) (allowing records requests during all hours of the entire police department's operations is unreasonable).
- ¹⁷¹ *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 624 (1994); *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 37 ("The right of inspection, as opposed to the right to request copies, is not conditioned on the payment of any fee under R.C. 149.43.").
- ¹⁷² *State ex rel. Sevayega v. Reis*, 88 Ohio St.3d 458, 459 (2000).
- ¹⁷³ *Gupta v. City of Cleveland*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00840PQ, 2018-Ohio-3475, ¶ 10 ("When a requester asks only to inspect records, the public office has no duty to deliver the records to the requester's doorstep."); *State ex rel. Penland v. Ohio Dept of Corr.*, 158 Ohio St.3d 15, 2019-Ohio-4130, ¶ 14 ("[t]he requester] has not shown that R.C. 149.43(B)(1) establishes a clear duty to transmit [the record] for inspection at a location other than the business office where it is maintained").
- ¹⁷⁴ *State ex rel. Gilreath v. Cuyahoga Job & Family Servs.*, S. Ct. No. 2022-0824, 2024-Ohio-103, ¶ 21.
- ¹⁷⁵ 2014 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 009.
- ¹⁷⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(6), (B)(7); *State ex rel. Watson v. Mohr*, 131 Ohio St.3d 338, 2012-Ohio-1006, ¶ 2; *State ex rel. Dehler v. Mohr*, 129 Ohio St.3d 37, 2011-Ohio-959, ¶ 3 (requester was not entitled to copies of requested records because he refused to submit prepayment); *State ex rel. Ware v. City of Akron*, 164 Ohio St.3d 557, 2021-Ohio-624, ¶ 13-15 (a public office complies with the Public Records Act when it identifies the cost of copies and offers to provide copies upon the payment of costs).
- ¹⁷⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(1) (copies of public records must be made available "at cost"); *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 625-26, 640 (1994) (public office cannot charge \$5.00 for initial page or for employee labor, but only for "actual cost" of final copies).
- ¹⁷⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(7); *State ex rel. Call v. Fragale*, 104 Ohio St.3d 276, 2004-Ohio-6589, ¶ 2-8.
- ¹⁷⁹ *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 626 (1994).

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- ¹⁸⁰ *State ex rel. Gibbs v. Concord Twp. Trustees*, 152 Ohio App.3d 387, 2003-Ohio-1586, ¶ 31 (11th Dist.); *State ex rel. Gambill v. Opperman*, 135 Ohio St.3d 298, 2013-Ohio-761, ¶ 29 (as long as the decision to hire a private contractor is reasonable, a public office may charge requester the actual cost to extract requested electronic raw data from an otherwise copyrighted database).
- ¹⁸¹ R.C. 1.51 (outlining the rules of statutory construction); *State ex rel. Motor Carrier Serv., Inc. v. Rankin*, 135 Ohio St.3d 395, 2013-Ohio-1505, ¶ 26-32; *State ex rel. Slagle v. Rogers*, 103 Ohio St.3d 89, 2004-Ohio-4354, ¶ 5-15.
- ¹⁸² *State ex rel. Slagle v. Rogers*, 103 Ohio St.3d 89, 2004-Ohio-4354, ¶ 15; For another example, see R.C. 5502.12(A) (Department of Public Safety may charge \$4.00 for each accident report copy).
- ¹⁸³ *State ex rel. Call v. Fragale*, 104 Ohio St.3d 276, 2004-Ohio-6589, ¶ 8 (court offered uncertified records at actual cost but may charge up to \$1.00 per page for certified copies pursuant to R.C. 2303.20).
- ¹⁸⁴ *State ex rel. Data Trace Information Servs., L.L.C. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Fiscal Officer*, 131 Ohio St.3d 255, 2012-Ohio-753, ¶ 42-62.
- ¹⁸⁵ *State ex rel. Call v. Fragale*, 104 Ohio St.3d 276, 2004-Ohio-6589, ¶ 6.
- ¹⁸⁶ *State ex rel. Ware v. City of Akron*, 164 Ohio St.3d 557, 2021-Ohio-624, ¶ 13-15 (public office complies with the Public Records Act when it identifies the cost of copies and offers to provide copies upon the payment of costs).
- ¹⁸⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(6). For discussion of previous law, see 2004 Ohio Atty. Gen. Ops. No. 011 (county recorder may not prohibit person from using digital camera to duplicate records or assess a copy fee).
- ¹⁸⁸ R.C. 149.011(G).
- ¹⁸⁹ *State ex rel. Wilson-Simmons v. Lake Cty. Sheriff's Dept.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 37, 41 (1998) (allegedly racist emails circulated between public employees are not "records" when the requested emails were not used to conduct the business of the public office).
- ¹⁹⁰ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Whitmore*, 83 Ohio St.3d 61, 63 (1998).
- ¹⁹¹ *State ex rel. Call v. Fragale*, 104 Ohio St.3d 276, 2004-Ohio-6589, ¶ 6.
- ¹⁹² See, e.g., R.C. 1347, et seq. (Ohio Personal Information Systems Act).
- ¹⁹³ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁹⁴ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁹⁵ R.C. 149.43(B)(4).
- ¹⁹⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(13).
- ¹⁹⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ¹⁹⁸ *State ex rel. Master v. Cleveland*, 76 Ohio St. 3d 340, 342 (1996).
- ¹⁹⁹ *State ex rel. Hogan-Lovells U.S., LLP v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 165 Ohio St.3d 368, 2021-Ohio-1762, ¶ 16-30 (conducting a document-by-document review to determine if the office correctly withheld privileged documents in their entirety in lieu of producing redacted versions).
- ²⁰⁰ R.C. 149.43(B)(1).
- ²⁰¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(3).
- ²⁰² R.C. 149.43(B)(3).
- ²⁰³ *State ex rel. Laborers Internatl. Union of N. Am., Local Union No. 500 v. Summerville*, 122 Ohio St.3d 1234, 2009-Ohio-4090, ¶ 6.
- ²⁰⁴ R.C. 149.43(B)(3).
- ²⁰⁵ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 74 ("[P]ermitting a public official to oppose a request as overbroad for the first time in litigation would enable the official to avoid the duty" to negotiate with the requester.).
- ²⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Andrews*, 48 Ohio St.2d 283, 289 (1976) ("No pleading of too much expense, or too much time involved, or too much interference with normal duties, can be used by the [public office] to evade the public's right to inspect and obtain a copy of public records within a reasonable time.").
- ²⁰⁷ *State ex rel. Dehler v. Mohr*, 129 Ohio St.3d 37, 2011-Ohio-959, ¶ 2 (allowing inmate to personally inspect requested records in another prison "would have created security issues, unreasonably interfered with the official's discharge of their duties, and violated prison rules"); *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers, Inc. v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 623 (1994) (explaining that "unreasonabl[e] interfere[nce] with the discharge of the duties of the officer having custody" of public records creates an exemption to the rule that public records should be generally available to the public).
- ²⁰⁸ *State ex rel. Dehler v. Mohr*, 129 Ohio St.3d 37, 2011-Ohio-959, ¶ 2.
- ²⁰⁹ R.C. 109.573(D), (E), (G)(1); R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(j).
- ²¹⁰ R.C. 2953.81(B).
- ²¹¹ R.C. 2950.08(A) (BCI sex offender registry and notification (SORN) information, not open to the public). But see R.C. 2950.13(A)(11) (providing that certain SORN information must be posted as a database on the internet and is a public record under R.C. 149.43).
- ²¹² R.C. 149.433(D).
- ²¹³ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 22 ("Voluntarily disclosing the requested record can waive any right to claim an exemption to disclosure.").
- ²¹⁴ R.C. 149.431; *State ex rel. Bell v. Brooks*, 130 Ohio St.3d 87, 2011-Ohio-4897, ¶ 30-40.
- ²¹⁵ R.C. 5502.12 (providing that other agencies that submit such reports may charge requesters who claim an interest arising out of a motor vehicle accident a non-refundable fee not to exceed \$4).
- ²¹⁶ R.C. 313.10(B).
- ²¹⁷ *State ex rel. Warren Newspapers, Inc. v. Hutson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 619, 625 (1994).
- ²¹⁸ Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio; *State ex rel. Bey v. Byrd*, 160 Ohio St.3d 141, 2020-Ohio-2766, ¶ 11. For additional discussion, see Chapter Five: B. "Court Records."
- ²¹⁹ R.C. 307.862(C); 2012 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 036.
- ²²⁰ R.C. 3319.321(A) (allowing schools to "require disclosure of the requestor's identity or the intended use of the directory information ... to ascertain whether the directory information is for use in a profit-making plan or activity").
- ²²¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(8); *State ex rel. Papa v. Starkey*, 5th Dist. Stark No.2014CA00001, 2014-Ohio-2989, ¶ 7-9 (the statutory process applies to an incarcerated criminal offender who seeks records relating to any criminal prosecution, not just of the inmate's own criminal case).
- ²²² See, e.g., R.C. 3319.321(A) (prohibiting schools from releasing student directory information "to any person or group for use in a profit-making plan or activity").
- ²²³ 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 050; see also R.C. 149.43(B)(4).
- ²²⁴ R.C. 149.43(B)(7)(c)(i) (noting exception when "the person certifies to the office in writing that the person does not intend to use or forward the requested records, or the information contained in them, for commercial purposes"). NOTE: the limitation only applies to records the office "will physically deliver by United States mail or by another delivery service."
- ²²⁵ R.C. 149.43(B)(7)(c)(iii).
- ²²⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(7)(c)(iii).
- ²²⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(9)(c) ("As used in division (B)(9) of [R.C. 149.43], 'journalist' means a person engaged in, connected with, or employed by any news medium, including a newspaper, magazine, press association, news agency, or wire service, a radio or television station, or a similar medium, for the purpose of gathering, processing, transmitting, compiling, editing, or disseminating information for the general public.")
- ²²⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(9)(a), (b).

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²²⁹ [R.C. 149.43\(F\)\(1\)](#).

²³⁰ These definitions are set forth at [R.C. 149.43\(F\)\(2\) \(a\)-\(d\), \(F\)\(3\)](#).

²³¹ [R.C. 313.10\(A\)](#).

²³² [R.C. 313.10\(B\)](#).

²³³ [R.C. 313.10\(A\)\(2\)\(a\)-\(f\)](#).

²³⁴ [R.C. 313.10\(C\)](#). A next-of-kin is entitled to a complete autopsy report even though the next-of-kin is incarcerated for murdering the subject of the autopsy report and the provisions of the Public Records Act regarding inmates, *see above*, do not apply. [State ex rel. Clay v. Cuyahoga Cty. Med. Examiner's Office](#), 152 Ohio St.3d 163, 2017-Ohio 8714, ¶ 37-38.

²³⁵ [R.C. 313.10\(D\)](#).

²³⁶ [R.C. 313.10\(E\)](#).

²³⁷ [R.C. 313.10\(F\)](#).

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Chapter Three: Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records

III. Chapter Three: Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records²³⁸

While the Public Records Act presumes and favors public access to government records, Ohio and federal laws provide limited exemptions to protect certain records from mandatory release. These laws can include constitutional provisions,²³⁹ statutes,²⁴⁰ common law,²⁴¹ or properly authorized administrative codes and regulations.²⁴² If a record does not clearly fit into one of the exemptions listed in the Public Records Act and is not otherwise exempt from disclosure by other state or federal law, it must be disclosed.

A. Valid Exemptions

1. Contracts cannot create exemptions

Exemptions can only be created through the legal authority discussed above: constitutional provisions, statutes, common law, or properly authorized administration codes and regulations. An exemption cannot be created by a contract. Public offices cannot contract around the Public Records Act, and thus cannot agree to contracts that would nullify or restrict the public's access to public records.²⁴³ Parties to a public contract, including settlement agreements,²⁴⁴ memoranda of understanding,²⁴⁵ and collective bargaining agreements,²⁴⁶ cannot nullify public records obligations by agreeing that records will not be public.²⁴⁷ Nor can an employee handbook confidentiality provision alter the status of public records.²⁴⁸ Absent a statutory exemption, a "public entity cannot enter into enforceable promises of confidentiality regarding public records."²⁴⁹

2. FOIA does not apply to Ohio public offices

A request for public records from a state or local agency in Ohio is governed only by the Public Records Act. The federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)²⁵⁰ and its exemptions do not apply to Ohio public offices.²⁵¹ Requests for records and information from federal agencies located in Ohio are governed by FOIA.

B. Categories of Exemptions

There are two types of public records exemptions: 1) those that mandate that a public office cannot release certain documents; and 2) those that allow the public office to choose whether to release certain documents.

Many records are subject to more than one exemption. Some may be subject to both a discretionary exemption (giving the public office the option to withhold) and a mandatory exemption (prohibiting release).

1. "Must not release"

The first type of exemption, a "mandatory" exemption, prohibits a public office from releasing specific records or information to the public, sometimes under civil or criminal penalties. Such records are prohibited from release in response to a public records request, and the public office has no choice but to redact or withhold the information or record. The Public Records Act expressly includes these mandatory restrictions in R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v), often referred to as the "catch-all" exemption: "records the release of which is prohibited by state or federal law."

A few mandatory exemptions apply to public offices on behalf of, and are subject to the decisions of, another person. For example, the attorney-client or physician-patient privilege may restrict a public, legal, or medical office from releasing certain records of its clients or patients.²⁵² In such cases, if the client or patient chooses to waive the privilege, the otherwise mandatory exemption would not apply and, in the absence of some other exemption, release of the records would be required.²⁵³

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2. “May release, but may choose to withhold”

The other type of exemption, a “discretionary” exemption, gives a public office the choice to either withhold or release specific records, often by excluding certain records from the definition of public records.²⁵⁴ This means that the public office does not have to disclose these records in response to a public records request; however, it may choose to do so without fear of punishment under the law. Discretionary exemptions are typically found in state or federal statutes. Some laws contain ambiguous titles or text such as “confidential” or “private.” But the test for determining whether the exemption is mandatory or discretionary is whether a particular law applied to a particular request *prohibits* release of a record or just gives the public office the *choice* to withhold the record.

C. Waiver of a Discretionary Exemption

If a valid discretionary exemption applies to a particular record, but the public office voluntarily discloses it, the office is deemed to have waived²⁵⁵ (abandoned) that exemption for that particular record, especially if the disclosure was to a person whose interests are antagonistic to those of the public office.²⁵⁶ However, “waiver does not necessarily occur when the public office that possesses the information makes limited disclosures [to other public officials] to carry out its business.”²⁵⁷ Under such circumstances, the information has never been disclosed to the public.²⁵⁸

D. Applying Exemptions

Public records belong to the people, not to the government officials or offices holding the records. Accordingly, public records laws must be liberally interpreted in favor of disclosure, and any exemptions in the law that permit certain types of records to be withheld from disclosure must be narrowly construed against the public records custodian.²⁵⁹ The public office has the burden of establishing that an exemption applies; the public office fails to meet that burden if it does not prove that the requested records fall squarely within a valid exemption.²⁶⁰ The Supreme Court of Ohio has stated that “in enumerating very narrow, specific exceptions to the public records statute, the General Assembly has already weighed and balanced the competing public policy considerations between the public’s right to know how its state agencies make decisions and the potential harm, inconvenience or burden imposed on the agency by disclosure.”²⁶¹

Thus, public offices must apply exemptions narrowly and only to the specific record or information in a record that falls squarely within the exemption. If only a single word is covered by an exemption, only that word may be redacted. Even if a statute expressly states that specific records of a public office are public, it does *not* mean that all other records of that office are exempt from disclosure.²⁶² The Public Records Act still applies to all the public records of the office.

When an office can show that non-exempt records are “inextricably intertwined” with exempt materials, the non-exempt records but only to the extent they are inseparable.²⁶³

A public office has no duty to submit a “privilege log” to preserve a claimed public records exemption.²⁶⁴

E. Exemptions Listed in the Public Records Act

The Public Records Act contains a list of records and types of information removed from the definition of “public record.”²⁶⁵ The full list is under R.C. 149.43(A)(1). These exemptions are listed below in brief summaries. Although the language of R.C. 149.43(A)(1) – “Public record” *does not mean any of the following* – gives the public office the *choice* to withhold or release these records, many of these same records are also subject to other laws that *prohibit* their release.

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Medical records	(a)	Medical records are defined as any document or combination of documents that: 1) pertains to a patient’s medical history, diagnosis, prognosis, or medical condition; - and 2) was generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment.²⁶⁶ Records meeting this definition need not be disclosed.²⁶⁷ Birth, death, and hospital admission or discharge records are not considered medical records for purposes of Ohio’s public records law and should be disclosed.²⁶⁸ Reports generated for reasons other than medical diagnosis or treatment, such as for employment or litigation purposes, are not “medical records” exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Act.²⁶⁹ However, other statutes or federal constitutional rights may prohibit disclosure,²⁷⁰ in which case the records or information are not public records under the “catch-all exemption,” R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v).
Probation/parole/post-release control	(b)	Records pertaining to probation and parole proceedings or proceedings related to the imposition of community control sanctions,²⁷¹ post-release control sanctions,²⁷² or to proceedings related to determinations under R.C. 2967.271 regarding the release or continued incarceration of an offender to whom that section applies. Examples of records covered by this exemption include pre-sentence investigation reports;²⁷³ records relied on to compile a pre-sentence investigation report;²⁷⁴ documents reviewed by the Parole Board in preparation for a parole hearing;²⁷⁵ and records of parole proceedings.²⁷⁶
Juvenile abortion proceedings	(c)	All records associated with the statutory process through which unmarried and unemancipated minors may obtain judicial approval for abortion procedures in lieu of parental consent. This exemption includes records from both trial- and appellate-level proceedings.²⁷⁷

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Adoption proceedings	(d), (e), and (f)	These three exemptions all relate to the confidentiality of adoption proceedings. Documents removed from the definition of “public record” include records pertaining to adoption proceedings;²⁷⁸ contents of an adoption file maintained by the Department of Health;²⁷⁹ a putative father registry;²⁸⁰ and an original birth record after a new birth record has been issued.²⁸¹ In limited circumstances, release of adoption records and proceedings may be appropriate. For example, the Department of Job and Family Services may release a putative father’s registration forms to the mother of the minor or to the agency or attorney who is attempting to arrange the minor’s adoption.²⁸² Forms pertaining to the social and medical histories of the biological parents may be inspected by an adopted person who has reached majority or to the adoptive parents of a minor.²⁸³ An adopted person at least 18 years old may be entitled to the release of identifying information or access to their adoption file.²⁸⁴
Trial preparation	(g)	“Trial preparation record” is defined as “any record that contains information that is specifically compiled in reasonable anticipation of, or in defense of, a civil or criminal action or proceeding, including the independent thought processes and personal trial preparation of an attorney.”²⁸⁵ Documents that a public office obtains through discovery during litigation are considered trial preparation records.²⁸⁶ Material compiled for a public attorney’s personal trial preparation may also constitute a trial preparation record.²⁸⁷ The exemption does not apply to settlement agreements or settlement proposals,²⁸⁸ or when there is insufficient evidence that litigation is reasonably anticipated at the time the records were prepared.²⁸⁹ Refer to Chapter Three: F.5.d. “Trial preparation records,” for additional discussion of this exemption.

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Confidential law enforcement investigatory records (CLEIRs)	(h)	CLEIRs are defined²⁹⁰ as records that (1) pertain to a law enforcement matter, <u>and</u> (2) have a high probability of disclosing any of the following: (1) The identity of an uncharged suspect; (2) The identity of an information source or witness to whom confidentiality has been reasonably promised, as well as any information provided by that source or witness that would tend to reveal the identity of the source or witness; (3) Specific confidential investigatory techniques or procedures or specific investigatory work product; or (4) Information that would endanger the life or physical safety of law enforcement personnel, a crime victim, a witness, or a confidential information source. Refer to Chapter Four: A. “CLEIRs: Confidential Law Enforcement Investigatory Records,” for additional discussion of this exemption.
Mediation	(i)	Records containing confidential “mediation communications” (R.C. 2710.03) or records of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission made confidential under R.C. 4112.05. ²⁹¹
DNA	(j)	DNA records stored in the state DNA database, pursuant to R.C. 109.573. ²⁹²
Inmate records	(k)	Inmate records released by the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) to the Department of Youth Services (DYS) or a court of record, pursuant to R.C. 5120.21(E). ²⁹³
Department of Youth Services	(l)	Records regarding children in its custody that are released for the limited purpose of carrying out the duties of DRC. ²⁹⁴
Intellectual property records	(m)	While this exemption seems broad, it has a specific definition for the purposes of the Public Records Act, and is limited to those non-financial and non-administrative records that are produced or collected: (1) by or for state university faculty or staff; (2) in relation to studies or research on an education, commercial, scientific, artistic, technical, or scholarly issue; and (3) which have not been publicly released, published, or patented.²⁹⁵ Refer to Chapter Three: F.6. “Intellectual property,” for additional discussion of this exemption.
Donor profile records	(n)	“Donor profile records” have a specific, limited definition for the purposes of the Public Records Act. First, it only applies to records about donors or potential donors to public colleges and universities.²⁹⁶ Second, the names and reported addresses of all donors and the date, amount, and condition of their donation(s) are all public information.²⁹⁷ The exemption applies only to all other records about a donor or potential donor.

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services	(o)	Records maintained by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services on statutory employer reports of new hires. ²⁹⁸
Designated public service workers	(p)	Residential and familial information of a peace officer, parole officer, probation officer, bailiff, prosecuting attorney, assistant prosecuting attorney, correctional employee, county or multicounty corrections officer, community-based correctional facility employee, designated Ohio national guard member, protective services worker, youth services employee, firefighter, EMT, EMS medical director or member of a cooperating physician advisory board, board of pharmacy employee, BCI investigator, emergency service telecommunicator, forensic mental health or mental health evaluation provider, regional psychiatric hospital employee, judge, magistrate, or federal law enforcement officer. ²⁹⁹ Refer to Chapter Four: D.5. “Residential and familial information of covered professions,” for additional discussion of this exemption.
Hospital trade secrets	(q)	Trade secrets of certain county and municipal hospitals. ³⁰⁰ “Trade secrets” are defined at R.C. 1333.61(D), the definitional section of Ohio’s Uniform Trade Secrets Act.
Recreational activities of minors	(r)	Information pertaining to the recreational activities of a person under the age of 18. This includes any information that would reveal the person’s: (1) Address or telephone number, or that of the person’s guardian, custodian, or emergency contact person; (2) Social security number, birth date, or photographic image; (3) Medical records, history, or information; or (4) Information sought or required for the purpose of allowing that person to participate in any recreational activity conducted or sponsored by a public office or obtain admission privileges to any recreational facility owned or operated by a public office. ³⁰¹
Child fatality review board	(s)	Listed records of a child fatality review board (except for the annual reports the boards are required by statute to submit to the Ohio Department of Health). ³⁰² The listed records are also prohibited from unauthorized release by R.C. 307.629.
Death of minor	(t)	Records and information provided to the executive director of a public children services agency or prosecutor regarding the death of a minor from possible abuse, neglect, or other criminal conduct. ³⁰³
Nursing home administrator licensing	(u)	Nursing home administrator licensing test materials, examinations, or evaluation tools. ³⁰⁴

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Catch-all exemption	(v)	Records the release of which is prohibited by state or federal law; this is often called the “catch-all” exemption. ³⁰⁵ Although state and federal statutes can create both mandatory and discretionary exemptions by themselves, this provision also incorporates any statutes or administrative codes that prohibit the release of specific records. A state or federal agency rule designating specific records as confidential that is properly promulgated by the agency will constitute a valid exemption ³⁰⁶ because such rules have the effect of law. ³⁰⁷ But, if the rule was promulgated outside the authority statutorily granted to the agency, the rule is invalid and will not constitute an exemption to disclosure. ³⁰⁸
Ohio Venture Capital Authority	(w)	Proprietary information of or relating to any person that is submitted to or compiled by the Ohio Venture Capital Authority. ³⁰⁹
Ohio Housing Finance Agency	(x)	Financial statements or data any person submits for any purpose to the Ohio Housing Finance Agency or the Controlling Board in connection with applying for, receiving, or accounting for financial assistance from the agency, and information that identifies any individual who benefits directly or indirectly from financial assistance from the agency. ³¹⁰
Foster care/childcare centers	(y)	Records and information relating to foster care givers and children housed in foster care, as well as children enrolled in licensed, certified, or registered childcare centers. This exemption applies only to records held by county agencies or the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. ³¹¹
Military discharges	(z)	Military discharges recorded with a county recorder. ³¹²
Public utility usage information	(aa)	Usage information including names and addresses of specific residential and commercial customers of a municipally owned or operated public utility. ³¹³
JobsOhio	(bb)	Records described in R.C. 187.04(C) (relating to JobsOhio) that are not designated to be made available to the public as provided in that division. ³¹⁴
Lethal injection	(cc)	Information and records concerning drugs used for lethal injections under R.C. 2949.221(B) and (C). ³¹⁵
Personal information	(dd)	“Personal information,” as defined in R.C. 149.45, includes an individual’s social security number; state or federal tax identification number; driver’s license number or state identification number; checking account number, savings account number, credit card number, or debit card number; and demand deposit number, money market account number, mutual fund account number, or any other financial or medical account number. ³¹⁶

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Secretary of State's address confidentiality program	(ee)	The confidential name, address, and other personally identifiable information of a program participant in the Secretary of State's Address Confidentiality Program established under R.C. 111.41 to R.C. 111.47, including records or portions of records pertaining to that program that identify the number of program participants that reside within a precinct, ward, township, municipal corporation, county, or any other geographic area smaller than the state. ³¹⁷
Military orders	(ff)	Orders for active military service of an individual serving or with previous service in the U.S. armed forces, including a reserve component, or the Ohio organized militia. ³¹⁸
Minors involved in school vehicle accidents	(gg)	"The name, address, contact information, or other personal information of an individual who is less than eighteen years of age that is included in any record related to a traffic accident involving a school vehicle in which the individual was an occupant at the time of the accident." ³¹⁹
Claims for payment for health care	(hh)	"Protected health information," as defined in 45 C.F.R. 160.103, the HIPAA Privacy Rule, that is in a claim for payment for a health care product, service, or procedure, as well as any other health claims data in another document that reveals the identity of an individual who is the subject of the data or could be used to reveal that individual's identity. ³²⁰
Depictions of victims	(ii)	Depictions by photograph, film, videotape, or printed or digital image of either "a victim of an offense the release of which would be, to a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities, an offensive and objectionable intrusion into the victim's expectation of bodily privacy and integrity" or "captures or depicts the victim of a sexually oriented offense, as defined in section 2950.01 of the Revised Code, at the actual occurrence of that offense." ³²¹
Restricted portions of dashboard camera and body camera	(jj)	Portions of a body-worn camera or dashboard camera recording that shows, communicates, or discloses any of the following: (1) The image or identity of a child or information that could lead to the identification of a child who is the primary subject of the recording; (continued on next page)

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Restricted portions of dashboard camera and body camera	(jj)	(continued from previous page) (2) The death of a person or deceased person's body, unless the death was caused by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or peace officer or under certain other circumstances; (3) The death of a correctional employee, youth services employee, peace officer or first responder that occurs when the decedent was performing official duties; (4) Grievous bodily harm unless the injury was effected by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or a peace officer; (5) An act of severe violence against a person that results in serious physical harm unless the injury was effected by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or peace officer; (6) Grievous bodily harm to, or an act of severe violence resulting in serious physical harm, against a correctional employee, youth services employee, or peace officer or first responder while the injured person was performing official duties; (7) A person's nude body; (8) Protected health information, the identity of a person in a health care facility who is not the subject of a law enforcement encounter, or any other information in a health care facility that could identify a person who is not the subject of a law enforcement encounter; (9) Information that could identify the alleged victim of a sex offense, menacing by stalking, or domestic violence; (10) Information that does not qualify as a confidential law enforcement investigatory record that could identify a confidential source if disclosure of the source or the information provided could reasonably be expected to threaten or endanger a person's safety or property; (11) A person's personal information who is not arrested, charged, or issued a written warning; (12) Proprietary police contingency plans or tactics that are intended to prevent crime and maintain public order and safety; (13) Personal conversations between peace officers unrelated to work; (14) Conversations between peace officers and members of the public that do not concern law enforcement activities; (continued on next page)
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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Restricted portions of dashboard camera and body camera	(jj)	(continued from previous page) (15) The interior of a residence unless it is the location of an adversarial encounter with, or use of force by, a peace officer; or (16) The interior of a private business not open to the public unless it is the location of an adversarial encounter with, or use of force by, a peace officer.³²² (17) Restricted portions of camera recordings depicting death, grievous bodily harm, acts of severe violence resulting in serious physical harm, and nudity may be released with the consent of the injured person, the decedent's executor or administrator or the person/person's guardian if the recording will not be used in connection with any probably or pending criminal proceeding or the recording has been used in connection with a criminal proceeding that was dismissed or for which a judgment has been entered pursuant to Rule 32 of the Rules of Criminal Procedure, and will not be used again in connection with any probably or pending criminal proceedings.³²³ If a person has been denied access to a restricted portion of a body-worn camera or dashboard camera recording, that person may file a mandamus action or a complaint with the clerk of the Court of Claims, seeking an order to release the recording. The court shall order the release of the recording if it determines that the public interest in the recording substantially outweighs privacy and other interests asserted to deny release.³²⁴ Refer to Chapter Four: B.1. "Body-worn and dashboard camera recordings," for additional discussion of this exemption.
Fetal-infant mortality review board	(kk)	Records and information submitted to a fetal-mortality review board, as well as the board's statements and work product. ³²⁵
Pregnancy-associated mortality review board	(ll)	Records and information submitted to a pregnancy-associated mortality review board, as well as the board's statements and work product. ³²⁶
Crime victim telephone numbers	(mm)	Telephone numbers of victims and witnesses to a crime listed on a law enforcement record or report. ³²⁷
Preneed funeral contracts	(nn)	Information and records contained in a report submitted to the board of embalmers and funeral directors. ³²⁸
Motor vehicle accident telephone numbers	(oo)	Telephone numbers of parties to a motor vehicle accident listed on a law enforcement record or report within 30 days of the accident. ³²⁹
Ohio school safety and crisis center records	(pp)	Records of individuals who have completed training offered by the Ohio school safety and crisis center. ³³⁰

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Type of Record(s)	§	Description
Domestic violence fatality review board	(qq)	Records presented to a domestic violence fatality review board, as well as the board's statements and work product. ³³¹
Victim's rights request form under Marsy's Law	(rr)	The victim's rights request form as provided in Marsy's Law under R.C. 2930.04.
Information in "case documents" under Marsy's Law	(rr)	Identifying information of a victim or victim's representative contained in "case documents" pursuant to R.C. 2930.07. ³³²
Special improvement districts	(ss)	Certain records of nonprofit corporation that creates a special improvement district under Chapter 1710 of the Revised Code. ³³³

Records excluded from the definition of a public record under R.C. 149.43(A)(1) that are, under law, permanently retained, become public records seventy-five years after the date they were created, except for attorney-client privileged records, trial preparation records, records protected by statements prohibiting the release of identifying information in adoption files signed under R.C. 3107.083, records protected by a denial of release form filed by the birth parent of an adopted child pursuant to R.C. 3107.46, or security and infrastructure records exempt from release by R.C. 149.433. Birth certificates where the biological parent's name has been redacted pursuant to R.C. 3107.391 must still be redacted before release. If any other section of the Revised Code establishes a conflicting time period for disclosure, the other section controls.

F. Categories of Exemptions Created by Other Laws

Below are examples of exemptions that are created by laws other than the Public Records Act. Some will require expert case-by-case analysis by the public office's legal counsel before application to a public records request.

Refer to Chapter Four, "Law Enforcement Records," for discussion of additional exemptions applicable to law enforcement and victims and witnesses. A full list of exemptions that are created by Ohio statutes beyond those mentioned in these chapters can be found in [Appendix A](#) of this Manual.

1. Exemptions affecting personal privacy

There is no general "privacy exemption" to the Public Records Act. Ohio has no general privacy law comparable to the federal Privacy Act.³³⁴ However, a public office is obligated to protect certain *non-public record* personal information from unauthorized dissemination.³³⁵ Though many of the exemptions to the Public Records Act apply to information people would consider "private," this section focuses specifically on records and information that are protected by: (1) the right to privacy found in the United States Constitution; and (2) R.C. 149.45 and R.C. 319.28(B), which are statutes designed to protect personal information on the internet.

a. Constitutional right to privacy

The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes a constitutional right to informational privacy under the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause. This right protects people's "interest in avoiding divulgence of highly personal information,"³³⁶ but must be balanced against the public interest in the information.³³⁷ Such information cannot be disclosed unless disclosure "narrowly serves a compelling state interest."³³⁸

In Ohio, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has limited this right to informational privacy to interests that rise to the level of "constitutional dimension" and implicate "fundamental" rights or rights "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty."³³⁹

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The Supreme Court of Ohio has “not authorized courts or other records custodians to create new exceptions to R.C. 149.43 based on a balancing of interests or generalized privacy concerns.”³⁴⁰ In matters that do not rise to fundamental constitutional levels, state statutes address privacy rights, and the Court defers to “the role of the General Assembly to balance the competing concerns of the public’s right to know and individual citizens’ right to keep private certain information that becomes part of the records of public offices.”³⁴¹ Cases finding a new or expanded constitutional right of privacy affecting public records are infrequent.

In the Sixth Circuit case of *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, police officers sued the city for releasing their unredacted personnel files to an attorney representing members of a criminal gang against whom the officers were testifying in a major drug case. The personnel files contained the addresses and phone numbers of the officers and their family members, as well as banking information, social security numbers, and photo IDs.³⁴² The Court held that, because release of the information could lead to the gang members causing the officers bodily harm, the officers’ fundamental constitutional rights to personal security and bodily integrity were at stake.³⁴³ The Court described this constitutional right as a person’s “interest in preserving [one’s] life.”³⁴⁴ The Court found that the Public Records Act did not require release of the files because the disclosure did not “narrowly serve[] the state’s interest in ensuring accountable governance.”³⁴⁵ The Sixth Circuit has similarly held that names, addresses, and dates of birth of adult cabaret license applicants are exempted from the Public Records Act because their release to the public poses serious risk to their personal security.³⁴⁶

Based on *Kallstrom*, the Supreme Court of Ohio subsequently held that police officers have a constitutional right to privacy in their personal information that could be used by defendants in a criminal case to achieve nefarious ends.³⁴⁷ The Supreme Court has also suggested that the constitutional right to privacy of minors would come into play when “release of personal information ... creates an unacceptable risk that a child could be victimized.”³⁴⁸ The Court of Claims has also applied the constitutional right to privacy to permit the redaction of an inmate’s nude body and underwear from video taken by officers’ body-worn cameras.³⁴⁹

However, neither the Supreme Court of Ohio nor the Sixth Circuit has applied broadly the constitutional right to privacy to the Public Records Act. Public offices and individuals should be aware of this potential protection but know that it is limited to circumstances involving fundamental rights and that most personal information is not protected by it.³⁵⁰

b. Personal information listed online

R.C. 149.45 requires public offices to redact, and permits certain individuals to request redaction of, specific personal information³⁵¹ from any records made available to the general public on the internet.³⁵² A person must make this request in writing on a form developed by the Attorney General, specifying the information to be redacted and providing any information that identifies the location of that personal information.³⁵³ In addition, certain designated public service workers can also request the redaction of their actual residential address from any records made available by public offices to the general public on the internet.³⁵⁴ When a public office receives a request for redaction, it must act in accordance with the request within five business days, if practicable.³⁵⁵ If the public office determines that redaction is not practicable, it must explain to the individual why the redaction is impracticable within five business days.³⁵⁶

R.C. 149.45 separately requires all public offices to redact, encrypt, or truncate the social security numbers of individuals from any documents made available to the public on the internet.³⁵⁷ If a public office becomes aware that an individual’s social security number was not redacted, the office must redact the social security number within a reasonable period of time.³⁵⁸

The statute provides that a public office is not liable in a civil action for any alleged harm that results from the failure to redact personal information or addresses on records made available on the

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internet to the public, unless the office acted with a malicious purpose, in bad faith, or in a wanton or reckless manner.³⁵⁹

In addition to the protections listed above, R.C. 319.28 allows a “designated public service worker”³⁶⁰ to submit a request, by affidavit, to remove his or her name from the general tax list of real and public utility property and insert initials instead.³⁶¹ Upon receiving such a request, the county auditor must act within five days in accordance with the request.³⁶² If removal is not practicable, the auditor’s office must explain to the individual why the removal and insertion is impracticable within five business days.³⁶³

c. Social security numbers

Social security numbers (SSNs) must be redacted before the disclosure of public records, including court records.³⁶⁴

Under the federal Privacy Act, any federal, state, or local government agency that asks individuals to disclose their SSNs must advise the person: (1) whether that disclosure is mandatory or voluntary and, if mandatory, under what authority the SSN is solicited; and (2) what use will be made of it.³⁶⁵ In short, a SSN can only be disclosed if an individual has been given prior notice that their SSN will be publicly available.

However, the Supreme Court of Ohio has held that 911 tapes must be made immediately available for public disclosure without redaction, even if the tapes contain SSNs.³⁶⁶ The Court explained that there is no expectation of privacy when a person makes a 911 call. Instead, there is an expectation that the information will be recorded and disclosed to the public.³⁶⁷

d. Driver’s privacy protection

An authorized recipient of personal information about an individual that the Bureau of Motor Vehicles obtained in connection with a motor vehicle record may re-disclose the personal information only for certain purposes.³⁶⁸

e. Income tax returns

Generally, any information gained as a result of municipal and state income tax returns, investigations, hearings, or verifications is confidential and may only be disclosed as permitted by law.³⁶⁹ Ohio’s municipal tax code provides that tax information may be disclosed only (1) in accordance with a judicial order; (2) in connection with the performance of official duties; or (3) in connection with authorized official business of the municipal corporation.³⁷⁰

One Attorney General Opinion concluded that W-2 federal tax forms prepared and maintained by a township as an employer are public records, but that W-2 forms filed as part of a municipal income tax return are confidential.³⁷¹ Release of municipal income tax information to the Auditor of State is permissible for purposes of facilitation of an audit.³⁷² Federal tax returns and “return information” are also confidential.³⁷³

f. Protected health information

State law makes “protected health information” confidential.³⁷⁴ This includes information that “describes an individual’s past, present, or future physical or mental status or condition, receipt of treatment or care, or purchase of health products” when the information either does reveal or could reveal the identity of the individual.³⁷⁵ Courts have concluded that cause-of-death determinations on death certificates are, “protected health information” that need not be disclosed in response to a public records request.³⁷⁶ Note: the Supreme Court of Ohio has taken this issue up for review in *Ludlow v. Ohio Department of Health*.³⁷⁷

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2. Juvenile records

Although it is a common misconception that such a law exists, there is no Ohio law that categorically excludes all juvenile records from public records disclosure.³⁷⁸ As with any other record, a public office must identify a specific law that requires or permits a record regarding a juvenile to be withheld; otherwise, it must be released.³⁷⁹

Records maintained by the juvenile court and parties for certain proceedings are not available for public inspection and copying.³⁸⁰ Although the juvenile court may exclude the public from most hearings, serious youthful offender proceedings and their transcripts are open to the public unless the court orders a hearing closed.³⁸¹ The closure hearing notice, proceedings, and decision must themselves be public.³⁸² Records of social, mental, and physical examinations conducted pursuant to a juvenile court order,³⁸³ records of juvenile probation,³⁸⁴ and records of juveniles held in custody by the Department of Youth Services are not public records.³⁸⁵ Sealed or expunged juvenile adjudication records must be withheld.³⁸⁶

Records prepared and kept by a public children services agency of investigations of families, children, and foster homes, and of the care of and treatment afforded children, and of other records required by the department of job and family services, are required to be kept confidential by the agency.³⁸⁷ These records shall be open to inspection by the agency and certain listed officials and to other persons upon the written permission of the executive director when it is determined that “good cause” exists to access the records (except as otherwise limited by R.C. 3107.17).³⁸⁸

Other exemptions that relate to juvenile records include: (1) reports regarding allegations of child abuse;³⁸⁹ (2) individually identifiable student records;³⁹⁰ (3) certain foster care and day care information;³⁹¹ and (4) information pertaining to the recreational activities of juveniles.³⁹²

For discussion of juvenile law enforcement records, see Chapter Four: B.3. “Juvenile law enforcement records.”

3. Student records³⁹³

The federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)³⁹⁴ prohibits educational institutions from releasing a student’s “education records” without the written consent of the eligible student³⁹⁵ or his or her parents, except as permitted by the Act.³⁹⁶ “Education records” are records directly related to a student that are maintained by an educational agency, or institution or by a party acting for the agency or institution.³⁹⁷ The term encompasses records such as school transcripts, attendance records, and student disciplinary records.³⁹⁸ “Education records” covered by FERPA are not limited to “academic performance, financial aid, or scholastic performance.”³⁹⁹ Note, however, that “education records” do not include records of an agency or institution’s law enforcement unit.⁴⁰⁰

A record is “directly related” to a student if it contains “personally identifiable information.” The latter term is defined broadly and covers not only obvious identifiers, such as student and family member names, addresses, and social security numbers, but also personal characteristics or other information that would make the student’s identity easily linkable.⁴⁰¹ In evaluating records for release, an agency or institution must consider what the records requester already knows about the student to determine if that knowledge, together with the information to be disclosed, would allow the requester to ascertain the student’s identity.

FERPA applies to all students, regardless of grade level. In addition, Ohio has adopted laws specifically applicable to public school students in grades kindergarten through 12.⁴⁰² Those laws provide that, unless otherwise authorized by law, no public school employee is permitted to release or permit access to personally identifiable information – other than directory information – concerning a public

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school student without written consent of the student's parent, guardian, or custodian if the student is under 18, or the consent of the student if the student is 18 or older.⁴⁰³

"Directory information" is one of several exemptions to the requirement that an institution obtain written consent prior to disclosure. "Directory information" is "information..." that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed."⁴⁰⁴ It includes a student's name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, date of graduation, and awards received.⁴⁰⁵ Pursuant to federal law, post-secondary institutions designate what they will unilaterally release as directory information. For grades kindergarten through 12, Ohio law leaves that designation to each school district board of education. Institutions at all levels must notify parents and eligible students and give them an opportunity to opt out of disclosure of their directory information.⁴⁰⁶

Ohio law prohibits release of directory information to any person or group for use in a profit-making plan or activity.⁴⁰⁷ A public office may require disclosure of the requester's identity or the intended use of directory information to ascertain whatever it will be used in a profit-making plan or activity.⁴⁰⁸

Although the release of FERPA-protected records is prohibited by law, a public office or school should redact a student's personal identifying information instead of withholding an entire record, when possible.⁴⁰⁹

4. Public safety and public office security

a. Security records

The security records and infrastructure records exemptions are defined in the same statute but are two separate exemptions that apply differently.

A "security record" is any record that "contains information directly used for protecting or maintaining the security of a public office against attack, interference, or sabotage . . . [or] to prevent, mitigate, or respond to acts of terrorism."⁴¹⁰ Protecting a public office includes protecting the employees, officers, and agents who work in that office.⁴¹¹ For example, a prison's shift-assignment duty rosters that showed where guards are posted, which guards are assigned to a particular post, and how many will be there at a given time, were exempt as security records. The court said that knowing where and when guards would be posted could be used to plan an escape or attack, or to smuggle contraband into the prison.⁴¹²

The office invoking the security record exemption "must provide evidence establishing that the record clearly contains information directly used for protecting or maintaining the security of a public office against attack, interference, or sabotage," unless it is otherwise obvious from the content of the record.⁴¹³ For example, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that the public office failed to show that video depicting the shooting of a judge was a security record because there was no evidence that the footage contained information that was directly used for protecting or maintaining the security of the office against attack, interference, or sabotage.⁴¹⁴ In another case, the Supreme Court held that records regarding the travel and expenses for State Highway Patrol troopers attending the Super Bowl with the Governor fell within the security records exemption. The public office submitted extensive evidence showing how "releasing records containing information about the Governor's security detail would reveal patterns, techniques, or information relevant to the size, scope, or nature of the security and protection provided to the Governor . . . [and] could be used to attack, interfere, or sabotage the Governor or his security detail."⁴¹⁵

Security records may be disclosed for purposes of construction, renovation, or remodeling of a public office without waiving the exempt status of that record.⁴¹⁶

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b. Infrastructure records

An “infrastructure record” is any record that discloses the configuration of a public office’s “critical systems,” such as its communications, computer, electrical, mechanical, ventilation, water, plumbing, or security systems.⁴¹⁷ In the case regarding a prison’s shift-assignment duty rosters the court held that the rosters were not infrastructure records because guard assignments and locations are not “systems” like a mechanical or electrical system, and the assignment of guards in the prison does not relate to the structural configuration of a building.⁴¹⁸

Floor plans or records showing the spatial relationship of the public office are not infrastructure records.⁴¹⁹ The Supreme Court of Ohio held that security camera footage that documented a use-of-force incident at the prison was not an infrastructure record because the video showed no more than what could be learned from a floor plan.⁴²⁰ The footage did not show the location of fire or other alarms, where officers are posted, or the configuration of any other critical system.

Like security records, infrastructure records may be disclosed for purposes of construction, renovation, or remodeling of a public office without waiving the exempt status of that record.⁴²¹

c. Records that would jeopardize the security of public office electronic records

Records that would disclose or may lead to the disclosure of records or information that would jeopardize the state’s continued use or security of any computer or telecommunications devices or services associated with electronic signatures, electronic records, or electronic transactions are not public records under the Public Records Act.⁴²²

5. Exemptions related to litigation

a. Attorney-client privilege and attorney work product

“The attorney-client privilege is one of the oldest recognized privileges for confidential communications.”⁴²³ Attorney-client privileged records and information must not be revealed without the client’s waiver.⁴²⁴ Such records are prohibited from release by the “catch-all” exemption to the Public Records Act.⁴²⁵

The attorney-client privilege arises when legal advice of any kind is sought from a professional legal advisor. Communications made in confidence between an attorney and a client that facilitate the attorney’s provision of legal advice are permanently protected from disclosure by the client or the legal advisor.⁴²⁶ Records or information that meet those criteria must be withheld or redacted in order to preserve attorney-client privilege.⁴²⁷ For example, drafts of proposed bond documents prepared by an attorney are protected by the attorney-client privilege and are not subject to disclosure.⁴²⁸

The attorney-client privilege applies to records of communications between public office clients and their attorneys in the same manner that it does for private clients and their attorneys.⁴²⁹ Communications between a client and an attorney’s agent (for example, a paralegal) may also be subject to the attorney-client privilege.⁴³⁰ The privilege also applies to “documents containing communications between members of the public entity represented about the legal advice given.”⁴³¹ For example, the narrative portions of itemized attorney billing statements to a public office that contain descriptions of work performed may be protected by the attorney-client privilege, although the portions that reflect dates, hours, rates, and the amount billed are usually not protected.⁴³²

The attorney work-product doctrine is a discovery privilege incorporated into Rule 26 of the Ohio Rules of Civil Procedure.⁴³³ According to the Supreme Court of Ohio, the “Public Records Act contains

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no exception for attorney work product except insofar as attorney work product constitutes trial-preparation records.”⁴³⁴ The work-product doctrine, therefore, is not an independent basis for shielding records from disclosure under the Public Records Act.⁴³⁵

b. Criminal discovery

Criminal defendants may use the Public Records Act to obtain otherwise public records in a pending criminal proceeding.⁴³⁶ However, Criminal Rule 16 is the “preferred mechanism to obtain discovery from the state.”⁴³⁷ When a criminal defendant makes a public records request, either directly or indirectly, it “shall be treated as a demand for discovery in a criminal case if, and only if, the request is made to an agency involved in the prosecution or investigation of that case.”⁴³⁸

When a prosecutor discloses materials to a criminal defendant pursuant to the Criminal Rules, that disclosure does not mean those records automatically become available for public disclosure.⁴³⁹ The prosecutor does not waive⁴⁴⁰ applicable public records exemptions, such as trial preparation records or confidential law enforcement records,⁴⁴¹ simply by complying with discovery rules.⁴⁴²

c. Civil discovery

In civil court proceedings, the parties are not limited to the materials available under the civil rules. A civil litigant is allowed to use the Public Records Act in addition to civil discovery.⁴⁴³ The exemptions contained in the Public Records Act do not protect documents from discovery in civil actions.⁴⁴⁴ The nature of a request as either discovery or a request for public records will determine any available enforcement mechanisms.⁴⁴⁵

The Ohio Rules of Evidence govern the use of public records as evidence in litigation.⁴⁴⁶ Justice Stratton’s concurring opinion in the case *Gilbert v. Summit County* noted that “[t]rial courts have discretion to admit or exclude evidence,” and “even though a party may effectively circumvent a discovery deadline by acquiring a document through a public records request, it is the trial court that ultimately determines whether those records will be admitted in the pending litigation.”⁴⁴⁷

d. Trial preparation records

R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(g) exempts from disclosure “trial preparation records,” which are defined as “any record that contains information that is specifically compiled in reasonable anticipation of, or in defense of, a civil or criminal action or proceeding, including the independent thought processes and personal trial preparation of an attorney.”⁴⁴⁸ Trial preparation records need not exist solely for the purpose of litigation; they can also serve the regular functions of a public office.⁴⁴⁹ Documents that a public office obtains as a litigant through discovery will ordinarily qualify as “trial preparation records.”⁴⁵⁰ Attorney trial notes and legal research are “trial preparation records” that may be withheld from disclosure.⁴⁵¹ Although records in a prosecutor’s file often can be classified as trial preparation records, “the presence of a record in a prosecutor’s file does not, in and of itself, turn something into a trial preparation record.”⁴⁵² For example, fact-finding investigations and routine offense and incident reports are subject to release while a criminal case is active, including those reports in the files of the prosecutor.⁴⁵³ Once an attorney has filed documents in a court case, any trial preparation exemption is waived, and the public office must produce those documents in response to subsequent records requests.⁴⁵⁴

*e. Protective orders and sealed or expunged court records*⁴⁵⁵

When the release of court records would prejudice the rights of the parties in an ongoing criminal or civil proceeding,⁴⁵⁶ court rules may permit a protective order prohibiting release of the records.⁴⁵⁷ Similarly, when court records relating to criminal convictions have been properly expunged or sealed, they are no longer public records.⁴⁵⁸ The criminal sealing statute does not apply to the sealing of pleadings in related civil cases.⁴⁵⁹ However, when a responsive record is sealed, the public office must

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provide the explanation for withholding, including the legal authority under which the record was sealed.⁴⁶⁰

Even absent statutory authority, trial courts have the inherent authority to seal court records, but it is a “limited power.”⁴⁶¹ The judicial power to seal criminal records is narrowly limited to cases in which the accused has been acquitted or exonerated in some way and protection of the accused’s privacy interest is paramount to prevent injustice.⁴⁶² The grant of a pardon under Article III, Section 11 of the Ohio Constitution does not automatically entitle the recipient to have the record of the pardoned conviction sealed⁴⁶³ or give the trial court the authority to seal the conviction outside of the statutory sealing process.⁴⁶⁴

f. Grand jury records

Criminal Rule 6(E) provides that “[d]eliberations of the grand jury and the vote of any grand juror shall not be disclosed,” and provides for the withholding of other specific grand jury matters by certain persons under specific circumstances.⁴⁶⁵ Materials covered by Criminal Rule 6 include transcripts, voting records, subpoenas, and the witness book.⁴⁶⁶ In contrast to those items that document the deliberations and vote of a grand jury, evidentiary documents submitted to the grand jury that would otherwise be public records remain public records.⁴⁶⁷ Release of the names of grand jury witnesses, witness subpoenas, and documents produced in response to a witness subpoena, are not restricted by Criminal Rule 6(E).⁴⁶⁸

g. Settlement agreements and other contracts

When a public office is a party to a settlement, the trial preparation records exemption does not apply to the settlement agreement.⁴⁶⁹ But the parties are entitled to redact any information within the settlement agreement that is subject to the attorney-client privilege.⁴⁷⁰ Any promise not to release a settlement agreement to which a public office is a party is void and unenforceable because a contractual provision cannot supersede the Public Records Act.⁴⁷¹ Further, the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct has advised that attorneys are not ethically allowed to offer or accept a settlement agreement that includes a provision that an attorney is prohibited from disclosing information that would otherwise be subject to mandatory disclosures under a public records request.⁴⁷²

6. Intellectual property

a. Trade secrets

Trade secret law is underpinned by “[t]he protection of competitive advantage in private, not public, business.”⁴⁷³ However, the Supreme Court of Ohio has held that certain governmental entities can have trade secrets in limited situations.⁴⁷⁴

Trade secrets are defined in R.C. 1333.61(D) as “information, including ... any business information or plans, financial information, or listing of names” that: (1) derives actual or potential independent economic value from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use; and (2) is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy.⁴⁷⁵

Information identified in a record by its owner as a trade secret is not automatically prohibited from release by the “catch-all” exemption to the Public Records Act. Rather, identification of a trade secret requires a fact-based assessment.⁴⁷⁶ “An entity claiming trade secret status bears the burden to identify and demonstrate that the material is included in categories of protected information under the statute and additionally must take some active steps to maintain its secrecy.”⁴⁷⁷

The Supreme Court of Ohio has adopted the following factors in analyzing a trade secret claim:

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- (1) The extent to which the information is known outside the business;
- (2) The extent to which it is known to those inside the business, i.e., by the employees;
- (3) The precautions taken by the holder of the trade secret to guard the secrecy of the information;
- (4) The savings effected and the value to the holder in having the information as against competitors;
- (5) The amount of effort or money expended in obtaining and developing the information; and
- (6) The amount of time and expense it would take for others to acquire and duplicate the information.⁴⁷⁸

The maintenance of secrecy is important but does not require that a trade secret be entirely unknown to the public. If parts of a trade secret are in the public domain, but the value of the trade secret derives from the parts being taken together with other secret information, then the trade secret remains protected under Ohio law.⁴⁷⁹ An *in camera* inspection may be necessary to determine if disputed records contain trade secrets.⁴⁸⁰

Signed non-disclosure agreements do not create trade secret status for otherwise publicly disclosable documents.⁴⁸¹ As with all other types of contracts, non-disclosure agreements cannot nullify public records obligations.⁴⁸²

b. Copyright

Federal copyright law is designed to protect “original works of authorship,” which may exist in one of several specified categories:⁴⁸³ (1) literary works; (2) musical works (including any accompanying words); (3) dramatic works (including any accompanying music); (4) pantomimes and choreographic works; (5) pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works; (6) motion pictures and other audiovisual works; (7) sound recordings; and (8) architectural works.⁴⁸⁴

Federal copyright law provides certain copyright owners the exclusive right of reproduction,⁴⁸⁵ which means public offices could expose themselves to legal liability if they reproduce copyrighted public records in response to a public records request. If a public record sought by a requester is copyrighted material that the public office does not possess the right to reproduce or copy via a copyright ownership or license, the public office is not typically authorized to make copies of this material under federal copyright law. However, there are some exemptions to this rule. For example, in certain situations, the copying of a portion of a copyrighted work may be permitted.⁴⁸⁶

Note that copyright law only prohibits unauthorized *copying* and should not affect a public records request for *inspection*.

Because of the complexity of copyright law and the fact-specific nature of this area, public bodies are encouraged to consult with their offices’ legal counsel on these issues.

7. Records of inmates

The Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) is required by law to keep records showing the name, residence, sex, age, nativity, occupation, condition, and date of commitment of every inmate in DRC’s custody, as well as special records for inmate deaths or injuries and medical records.⁴⁸⁷ By statute, these records are not public records.⁴⁸⁸ This exception only applies to the records that DRC is specifically required to keep by statute; DRC is not permitted to withhold records simply because the records may relate to inmates.⁴⁸⁹

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Notes:

²³⁸ In this section, the term “exemption” will be used to describe laws authorizing the withholding of records from public records requests. The term “exception” is also often used in public records law and court cases.

²³⁹ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Keller v. Cox*, 85 Ohio St.3d 279, 282 (1999).

²⁴⁰ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 56 (applying R.C. 2151.421).

²⁴¹ An example being the common law attorney-client privilege. See *State ex rel. Leslie v. Ohio Hous. Fin. Agency*, 105 Ohio St.3d 261, 2005-Ohio-1508, ¶ 27.

²⁴² See, e.g., *State ex rel. Lindsay v. Dwyer*, 108 Ohio App.3d 462, 467 (10th Dist. 1996) (finding State Teacher Retirement System properly denied access to beneficiary form pursuant to Ohio Administrative Code); *2000 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 036* (determining that federal regulation prohibits release of service member’s discharge certificate without service member’s written consent); but see *State ex rel. Gallon & Takacs Co., L.P.A. v. Conrad*, 123 Ohio App.3d 554, 561 (10th Dist. 1997) (if regulation was promulgated outside of agency’s statutory authority, the invalid rule will not constitute an exemption to the Public Records Act).

²⁴³ *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 76 Ohio St.3d 1224 (1996) (contract provision designating as confidential applications and resumes for city position could not alter public nature of information); *State ex rel. Clough v. Franklin Cty. Children Servs.*, 144 Ohio St.3d 83, 2015-Ohio-3425, ¶ 16 (a written policy of permitting the clients of a public office to see their files does not create a legally enforceable obligation on the public office to provide access when access to requested files is prohibited by law); *Teodecki v. Litchfield Twp.*, 9th Dist. Medina No. 14CA0035-M, 2015-Ohio-2309, ¶ 25 (confidentiality clause prohibiting disclosure of an investigative report about a public official’s actions was unenforceable and invalid).

²⁴⁴ See Chapter Three: F.5.g. “Settlement agreements and other contracts.”

²⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 40-41.

²⁴⁶ *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400, 403 (1997) (contract provision designating as confidential applications and resumes for city position could not alter public nature of information); *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Wells*, 18 Ohio St.3d 382, 384 (1985) (provision in collective bargaining agreement between city and its police force requiring city to ensure confidentiality of officers’ personnel records is invalid; otherwise, “private citizens would be empowered to alter legal relationships between a government and the public at large”).

²⁴⁷ *Keller v. Columbus*, 100 Ohio St.3d 192, 2003-Ohio-5599, ¶ 23 (“[A]ny provision in a collective bargaining agreement that establishes a schedule for the destruction of public records is unenforceable if it conflicts with or fails to comport with all the dictates of the Public Records Act.”).

²⁴⁸ *State ex rel. Russell v. Thomas*, 85 Ohio St.3d 83, 85 (1999).

²⁴⁹ *State ex rel. Findlay Publishing Co. v. Hancock Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 80 Ohio St.3d 134, 137 (1997); see also *State ex rel. Natl. Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Cleveland*, 82 Ohio App.3d 202, 212-13 (8th Dist. 1992) (finding unenforceable an agreement between the city and police union to keep officers’ home addresses and telephone numbers confidential).

²⁵⁰ 5 U.S.C. § 552.

²⁵¹ *State ex rel. WBNS TV, Inc. v. Dues*, 101 Ohio St.3d 406, 2004-Ohio-1497, ¶ 35; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 32.

²⁵² *State ex rel. Nix v. Cleveland*, 83 Ohio St.3d 379 (1998).

²⁵³ *State ex rel. Dreamer v. Mason*, 115 Ohio St.3d 190, 2007-Ohio-4789 (illustrating the interplay of attorney-client privilege, waiver, public records law, and criminal discovery).

²⁵⁴ *2000 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 021* (“R.C. 149.43 does not expressly prohibit the disclosure of items that are excluded from the definition of public record, but merely provides that their disclosure is not mandated.”); see also *2001 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 041*.

²⁵⁵ *State ex rel. Wallace v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 89 Ohio St.3d 431, 435 (2000) (“waiver” is defined as a voluntary relinquishment of a known right).

²⁵⁶ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Hicks v. Fraley*, 166 Ohio St.3d 141, 2021-Ohio-2724, ¶ 23 (county auditor waived attorney-client privilege by voluntarily disclosing opinion letter to special prosecutor); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 22; *Aire-Ride, Inc. v. DHL Express (USA) Inc.*, 12th Dist. Clinton No. CA2008-01-001, 2008-Ohio-5669, ¶ 17-30 (attorney-client privilege was waived when counsel had reviewed, marked confidential, and inadvertently produced documents during discovery).

²⁵⁷ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Sharp*, 151 Ohio App.3d 756, 761, 2003-Ohio-1186, ¶ 14 (1st Dist.) (statutory confidentiality of documents submitted to municipal port authority not waived when port authority shares documents with county commissioners); *State ex rel. Musial v. N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 37 (forwarding police investigation records to a city’s ethics commission did not constitute waiver).

²⁵⁸ *State ex rel. Musial v. N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 465, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 35-39.

²⁵⁹ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Pietrangelo v. Avon Lake*, 146 Ohio St.3d 292, 2016-Ohio-2974, ¶ 9.

²⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Rocker v. Guernsey Cty. Sheriff’s Office*, 126 Ohio St.3d 224, 2010-Ohio-3288, ¶ 7.

²⁶¹ *State ex rel. James v. Ohio State Univ.*, 70 Ohio St.3d 168, 172 (1994). NOTE: the Supreme Court of Ohio has not authorized courts or other records custodians to create new exemptions to R.C. 149.43 based on a balancing of interests or generalized privacy concerns. See *State ex rel. WBNS TV, Inc. v. Dues*, 101 Ohio St.3d 406, 2004-Ohio-1497, ¶ 31.

²⁶² *Franklin Cty. Sheriff’s Dept. v. State Emp. Relations Bd.*, 63 Ohio St.3d 498, 502 (1992) (while categories of records designated in R.C. 4117.17 clearly are public records, all other records must still be analyzed under R.C. 149.43).

²⁶³ *State ex rel. Gambill v. Opperman*, 135 Ohio St.3d 298, 2013-Ohio-761, ¶ 21-25; *State ex rel. Dawson v. Bloom-Carroll Local School Dist.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 10, 2011-Ohio-6009, ¶ 29.

²⁶⁴ *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 24.

²⁶⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a)-(gg).

²⁶⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a) (applying Public Records Act definition of “medical records” at R.C. 149.43(A)(3)).

²⁶⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(3); *State ex rel. Strothers v. Wertheim*, 80 Ohio St.3d 155, 158 (1997); *1999 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 06*.

²⁶⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(3).

²⁶⁹ See *State ex rel. O’Shea & Assocs. L.P.A. v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 149, 2012-Ohio-115, ¶ 41-43 (questionnaires and release authorizations generated to address lead exposure in city-owned housing not “medical records” despite touching on children’s medical histories); *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 144-45 (1995) (police psychologist report obtained to assist in the police hiring process not a medical record).

²⁷⁰ See, e.g., 42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq. (1990) (Americans with Disabilities Act); 29 U.S.C. 2601 et seq. (1993) (Family and Medical Leave Act).

²⁷¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(11) (“Community control sanction” has the same meaning as in R.C. 2929.01).

²⁷² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(b); R.C. 149.43(A)(12) (“Post-release control sanction” has the same meaning as in R.C. 2967.01).

²⁷³ *State ex rel. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers v. Gosser*, 20 Ohio St.3d 30, 32 (1985), fn.2.

²⁷⁴ *State ex rel. Hadlock v. Polito*, 74 Ohio App.3d 764, 766 (8th Dist. 1991).

²⁷⁵ *State ex rel. Lipschutz v. Shoemaker*, 49 Ohio St.3d 88, 90 (1990).

²⁷⁶ *State ex rel. Gaines v. Adult Parole Auth.*, 5 Ohio St.3d 104 (1983).

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- ²⁷⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(c) (referencing R.C. 2151.85 and 2919.121(C)).
- ²⁷⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(d); R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(f) (referencing R.C. 3107.52(A)).
- ²⁷⁹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(d) (referencing R.C. 3705.12 to 3705.124).
- ²⁸⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(e) (referencing R.C. 3107.062 and R.C. 3111.69).
- ²⁸¹ R.C. 3705.12.
- ²⁸² R.C. 3107.063.
- ²⁸³ R.C. 3107.17(D).
- ²⁸⁴ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(f); R.C. 3107.38(B), (C).
- ²⁸⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(4); see also Chapter Three: F.5.d. “Trial preparation records.”
- ²⁸⁶ *Cleveland Clinic Found. v. Levin*, 120 Ohio St.3d 1210, 2008-Ohio-6197, ¶ 10.
- ²⁸⁷ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 46-51.
- ²⁸⁸ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 16-21.
- ²⁸⁹ *State ex rel. O’Shea & Assocs. v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 149, 2012-Ohio-115, ¶ 44; *Betkowski v. Trafis*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 102540, 2015-Ohio-5139, ¶ 27 (trial preparation records exemption is inapplicable to records of a police investigation when the police had closed the investigation, no crime was charged or even contemplated, and thus trial was not reasonably anticipated).
- ²⁹⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(2).
- ²⁹¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(i).
- ²⁹² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(j).
- ²⁹³ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(k).
- ²⁹⁴ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(l); R.C. 5139.05(D)(1); see R.C. 5139.05(D) for all records maintained by DYS of children in its custody.
- ²⁹⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(m); R.C. 149.43(A)(5); see also *Zamlen-Spotts v. Cleveland State Univ.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00087PQ, 2021-Ohio-2704, ¶ 9-18, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00087PQ, 2021-Ohio-3128 (individual questionnaire responses to a university-conducted survey are exempted intellectual property records); *State ex rel. Physicians Comm. for Responsible Medicine v. Bd. of Trustees of Ohio State Univ.*, 108 Ohio St.3d 288, 2006-Ohio-903, ¶ 33 (university’s records of spinal cord injury research are exempted intellectual property records because the limited sharing of the records with other researchers to further the advancement of spinal cord injury research did not mean that the records had been “publicly released”); *Citak v. Ohio State Univ.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00563PQ, 2022-Ohio-1195, ¶ 2, 11, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00563PQ, 2022-Ohio-1616 (individual results of university-administered COVID survey qualified as intellectual property records because they were compiled as part of scholarly research).
- ²⁹⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(6) (“‘Donor profile record’ means all records about donors or potential donors to a public institution of higher education....”).
- ²⁹⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(6).
- ²⁹⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(o) (referencing R.C. 3121.894).
- ²⁹⁹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(p); R.C. 149.43(A)(7)-(8).
- ³⁰⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(q).
- ³⁰¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(r); R.C. 149.43(A)(10).
- ³⁰² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(s) (referencing R.C. 307.621 - 629).
- ³⁰³ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(t) (referencing R.C. 5153.171).
- ³⁰⁴ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(u) (referencing R.C. 4751.15).
- ³⁰⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v).
- ³⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Lindsay v. Dwyer*, 108 Ohio App.3d 462, 466-467 (10th Dist. 1996) (State Teachers Retirement System properly denied access to beneficiary form pursuant to Ohio Administrative Code); 2000 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 036 (federal regulation prohibits Governor’s Office of Veterans Affairs from releasing service member’s discharge certificate prohibited from release without service member’s written consent).
- ³⁰⁷ *Columbus & Southern Ohio Elec. Co. v. Indus. Comm.*, 64 Ohio St.3d 119, 122 (1992); *Doyle v. Ohio Bur. of Motor Vehicles*, 52 Ohio St.3d 46, 48 (1990); *State ex rel. DeBoe v. Indus. Comm.*, 161 Ohio St. 67 (1954), paragraph one of the syllabus.
- ³⁰⁸ *State ex rel. Gallon & Takacs Co., L.P.A. v. Conrad*, 123 Ohio App.3d 554, 560-61 (10th Dist. 1997) (Bureau of Workers’ Compensation administrative rule prohibiting release of managed care organization applications was unauthorized attempt to create exemption).
- ³⁰⁹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(w) (referencing R.C. 150.01).
- ³¹⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(x).
- ³¹¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(y) (referencing R.C. 5101.29).
- ³¹² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(z) (referencing R.C. 317.24).
- ³¹³ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(aa).
- ³¹⁴ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(bb).
- ³¹⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(cc) (referencing R.C. 2949.221); see also *State ex rel. Hogan Lovells U.S., L.L.P. v. Dept. of Rehab & Corr.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 56, 2018-Ohio-5133, ¶ 13-24 (applying R.C. 2949.221).
- ³¹⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd) (referencing R.C. 149.45).
- ³¹⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ee).
- ³¹⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ff).
- ³¹⁹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(gg).
- ³²⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(hh).
- ³²¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ii).
- ³²² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(jj), (A)(17).
- ³²³ R.C. 149.43(A)(17)(a)-(q), (H).
- ³²⁴ R.C. 149.43(H)(2).
- ³²⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(kk).
- ³²⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ll).
- ³²⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(mm).
- ³²⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(nn).
- ³²⁹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(oo).
- ³³⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(pp) (referencing R.C. 5502.703). Note, however, that boards of education must notify the public if the board has authorized any persons to go armed within a school. See R.C. 2923.122(D)(1)(d); R.C. 149.433(B)(4).
- ³³¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(gg).
- ³³² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(rr).
- ³³³ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ss).
- ³³⁴ 5 U.S.C. § 552a.
- ³³⁵ Ohio’s Personal Information Systems Act (PISA) (R.C. Chapter 1347), that only applies when the Public Records Act does not apply; that is, PISA does not apply to public records but only applies to records that have been determined to be non-public and information that is not a “record” as defined by the Public Records Act. Public offices can find more detailed guidance at <https://infosec.ohio.gov/Government.aspx>. See also

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Fischer v. Kent State Univ., 10th Dist. Franklin No. 14AP-789, 2015-Ohio-3569, ¶ 15 (legal brief written by state university's attorneys in response to retired professor's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claims constituted a public record; even though the brief contained stored personal information from professor's employment records, it was not exempt from disclosure pursuant to Ohio's PISA Act).

³³⁶ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1061 (6th Cir. 1998).

³³⁷ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1061 (6th Cir. 1998).

³³⁸ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1059 (6th Cir. 1998).

³³⁹ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1062 (6th Cir. 1998).

³⁴⁰ *State ex rel. WBNS TV v. Dues*, 101 Ohio St.3d 406, 2004-Ohio-1497, ¶ 30-31, 36-37.

³⁴¹ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Univ. of Toledo Found.*, 65 Ohio St.3d 258, 266 (1992).

³⁴² *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1059 (6th Cir. 1998).

³⁴³ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1063 (6th Cir. 1998).

³⁴⁴ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1063 (6th Cir. 1998).

³⁴⁵ *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1065 (6th Cir. 1998).

³⁴⁶ *Deja Vu of Cincinnati, LLC v. Union Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 411 F.3d 777, 793-794 (6th Cir. 2005) (en banc).

³⁴⁷ *State ex rel. Keller v. Cox*, 85 Ohio St.3d 279, 282 (1999); see also *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Craig*, 132 Ohio St.3d 68, 2012-Ohio-1999, ¶ 13-23 (identities of officers involved in fatal accident with motorcycle club exempted from disclosure based on constitutional right of privacy when release would create likely threat of serious bodily harm or death).

³⁴⁸ *State ex rel. McCleary v. Roberts*, 88 Ohio St.3d 365, 372, 2000-Ohio-345 (2000); but see *Sengstock v. City of Twinsburg*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-0330PQ, 2021-Ohio-4438, ¶ 23, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-0330PQ, 2022-Ohio-314 (denying application of the constitutional right to privacy in the names of juvenile public employees).

³⁴⁹ *Shaffer v. Budish*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00690PQ, 2018-Ohio-1539, ¶ 41-46, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2017-00690PQ (Feb. 22, 2018). NOTE: this case preceded the enactment of R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(jj), which creates exemptions for certain types of body-worn camera video recordings. See Chapter Four: B.1. "Body-worn and dashboard camera recordings."

³⁵⁰ *State ex rel. Quolke v. Strongsville City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 99733, 2013-Ohio-4481, ¶ 3 (ordering public office to release replacement teachers' names because public office failed to establish that threats and violent acts continued after strike), aff'd, 142 Ohio St.3d 509, 2015-Ohio-1083, ¶ 25-28.

³⁵¹ "Personal information" is defined as an individual's: social security number, federal or state tax identification number, driver's license or state identification number, checking account number, savings account number, credit card number, debit card number, or any other financial or medical account number. R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd); R.C. 149.45.

³⁵² R.C. 149.45(C)(1).

³⁵³ This form is available at <http://www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Sunshine>. NOTE: this section does not apply to county auditor offices. See R.C. 149.45(D)(1).

³⁵⁴ R.C. 149.45(A)(2); R.C. 149.43(A)(7)-(8). Refer to Chapter Four: D.5. "Residential and familial information of covered professions," for additional discussion of this provision.

³⁵⁵ R.C. 149.45(C)(2), (D)(2).

³⁵⁶ R.C. 149.45(C)(2), (D)(2). A public office may explain the impracticability of redaction either verbally or in writing.

³⁵⁷ R.C. 149.45(B)(1), (2). A public office must redact social security numbers from records that were posted before the effective date of R.C. 149.45.

³⁵⁸ R.C. 149.45(E)(1).

³⁵⁹ R.C. 149.45(E)(2).

³⁶⁰ R.C. 319.28(B)(1), citing R.C. 149.43(A)(7).

³⁶¹ R.C. 319.28(B)(1).

³⁶² R.C. 319.28(B)(2).

³⁶³ R.C. 319.28(B)(2).

³⁶⁴ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd); see also *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Bond*, 98 Ohio St.3d 146, 2002-Ohio-7117, ¶ 25 (personal information of jurors was used only to verify identification not to determine competency to serve on the jury, and social security numbers, telephone numbers, and driver's license numbers may be redacted); 1996 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 034 (opining that a county recorder is under no duty to obliterate social security numbers before making a document available for public inspection when the recorder presented with the document was asked to file it).

³⁶⁵ Privacy Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-579, 88 Stat. 1896 (5 U.S.C. 552a).

³⁶⁶ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hamilton Cty.*, 75 Ohio St.3d 374, 379 (1996).

³⁶⁷ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Morrow Cty. Prosecutor's Office*, 105 Ohio St.3d 172, 2005-Ohio-685, ¶ 8; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hamilton Cty.*, 75 Ohio St.3d 374, 378 (1996).

³⁶⁸ 18 U.S.C. § 2721 et seq. (Driver's Privacy Protection Act); R.C. 4501.27; O.A.C. 4501:1-12-01; 2014 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 007; see also *State ex rel. Motor Carrier Serv. v. Williams*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 10AP-1178, 2012-Ohio-2590, ¶ 23 (requester motor carrier service not entitled to unredacted copies of an employee's driving record from the BMV when requester did not comply with statutory requirements for access).

³⁶⁹ R.C. 5747.18; R.C. 718.13(A). Several statutes refer to the confidentiality of information contained in tax filings, not the record itself. *Myers v. Dept. of Taxation*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-01207PQ, 2019-Ohio-2760, ¶ 21. But the Court of Claims has held that the Department of Taxation need not produce tax returns with the protected information redacted; it may withhold tax returns. *Id.* at ¶ 26.

³⁷⁰ R.C. 718.13; see also *Cincinnati ex rel. Cosgrove v. Grogan*, 141 Ohio App.3d 733, 755 (1st Dist. 2001) (under Cincinnati Municipal Code, the city's use of tax information in a nuisance-abatement action constituted an official purpose for which disclosure is permitted).

³⁷¹ 1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 005. There is no prohibition on publishing or disclosing tax statistics that do not disclose information about specific taxpayers. R.C. 718.13(B).

³⁷² R.C. 5747.18; see also 1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 010.

³⁷³ 26 U.S.C. § 6103(a).

³⁷⁴ R.C. 3701.17(B).

³⁷⁵ R.C. 3701.17(A)(2).

³⁷⁶ *Walsh v. Ohio Dept. of Health*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 21AP-109, 2022-Ohio-272, ¶ 15.

³⁷⁷ *Ludlow v. Ohio Dept. of Health*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 21AP-369, 2022-Ohio-3399, appeal pending, S.Ct. No. 2022-Ohio-1391.

³⁷⁸ 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 101; see also *Sengstock v. City of Twinsburg*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00330PQ, 2021-Ohio-4438, ¶ 13, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-0330PQ, 2022-Ohio-314 (juvenile employee names in a payroll record do not fall under any exemption).

³⁷⁹ 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 101; see also Chapter Two: A.15.c. "Requirement to notify of and explain redactions and withholding of records." *Juv. R. 27 and 37(B)*; 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 101 (clarified by 2017 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 042).

³⁸⁰ *State ex rel. Scripps Howard Broadcasting Co. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Court of Common Pleas*, 73 Ohio St.3d 19, 21-22 (1995) (the release of a transcript of a juvenile contempt proceeding was required when proceedings were open to the public).

³⁸² *State ex rel. Plain Dealer Publishing Co. v. Floyd*, 111 Ohio St.3d 56, 2006-Ohio-4437, ¶ 44-52.

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- ³⁸³ Juv.R. 32(B).
- ³⁸⁴ R.C. 2151.14 (B).
- ³⁸⁵ R.C. 5139.05(D).
- ³⁸⁶ R.C. 2151.355-.358; see *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 6, 9, 38, 43 (when records were sealed pursuant to R.C. 2151.356, the response, “There is no information available,” was a violation of the R.C. 149.43(B)(3) requirement to provide a sufficient explanation, with legal authority, for the denial); see also Chapter Five: B. “Court Records.”
- ³⁸⁷ R.C. 5153.17; *State ex rel. Edinger v. Cuyahoga Cty. Dept. of Children & Family Serv.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 86341, 2005-Ohio-5453, ¶ 6-7.
- ³⁸⁸ R.C. 5153.17; 1991 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 003.
- ³⁸⁹ R.C. 2151.421(I); *State ex rel. Clough v. Franklin Cty. Children Servs.*, 144 Ohio St.3d 83, 2015-Ohio-3425, ¶ 19 (finding the report of a child-abuse allegation and the investigation of that allegation is confidential under R.C. 2151.421); *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 44-45.
- ³⁹⁰ See Chapter Three: F.3. “Student records.”
- ³⁹¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(y), citing R.C. 5101.29.
- ³⁹² R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(r); see also *State ex rel. McCleary v. Roberts*, 88 Ohio St.3d 365, 2000-Ohio-345 (2000).
- ³⁹³ See also Chapter Five: A.9. “School records.”
- ³⁹⁴ 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.
- ³⁹⁵ 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (“eligible student” means a student who has reached 18 years of age or is attending an institution of post-secondary education).
- ³⁹⁶ 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
- ³⁹⁷ 34 C.F.R. § 99.3; *State ex rel. School Choice Ohio, Inc. v. Cincinnati Public School Dist.*, 147 Ohio St.3d 256, 2016-Ohio-5026, ¶ 20 (under FERPA a school district could not change the categories that fit within the term “directory information” through a policy treating “directory information” as “personally identifiable information” not subject to release without parental consent).
- ³⁹⁸ *State ex rel. ESPN, Inc. v. Ohio State Univ.*, 132 Ohio St.3d 212, 2012-Ohio-2690, ¶ 28-30 (university disciplinary records are education records); see also *United States v. Miami Univ.*, 294 F.3d 797, 802-03 (6th Cir. 2002).
- ³⁹⁹ *State ex rel. ESPN, Inc. v. Ohio State Univ.*, 132 Ohio St.3d 212, 2012-Ohio-2690, ¶ 30.
- ⁴⁰⁰ 34 C.F.R. § 99.8; *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Univ. of Cincinnati*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00144PQ, 2020-Ohio-4958, ¶ 31, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00144PQ, 2020-Ohio-5279 (“FERPA neither requires nor prohibits the disclosure by an educational institution of its law enforcement unit records.”).
- ⁴⁰¹ 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
- ⁴⁰² R.C. 3319.321.
- ⁴⁰³ R.C. 3319.321(B). The consent requirement does not cease upon the student’s death. *State ex rel. Cable News Network, Inc. v. Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Local Schs.*, 163 Ohio St.3d 314, 2020-Ohio-5149, ¶ 18 (deceased mass shooter’s school records not public absent consent).
- ⁴⁰⁴ 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
- ⁴⁰⁵ R.C. 3319.321(B)(1).
- ⁴⁰⁶ 34 C.F.R. § 99.37.
- ⁴⁰⁷ *State ex rel. School Choice Ohio, Inc. v. Cincinnati Public School Dist.*, 147 Ohio St.3d 256, 2016-Ohio-5026, ¶ 31-34 (finding release of student directory information to nonprofit organization that informs parents about alternative educational opportunities is not prohibited by state law).
- ⁴⁰⁸ 34 C.F.R. § 99.3, R.C. 3319.321(A).
- ⁴⁰⁹ *State ex rel. ESPN, Inc. v. Ohio State Univ.*, 132 Ohio St.3d 212, 2012-Ohio-2690, ¶ 34.
- ⁴¹⁰ R.C. 149.433(A)(1)-(2).
- ⁴¹¹ *State ex rel. Plunderbund Media v. Born*, 141 Ohio St.3d 422, 2014-Ohio-3679, ¶ 19-31 (considering investigative agency testimony to conclude that records documenting threats to the governor were “security records”).
- ⁴¹² *McDougald v. Greene*, 162 Ohio St.3d 250, 2020-Ohio-4268, ¶ 9.
- ⁴¹³ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 51.
- ⁴¹⁴ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St. 3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371.
- ⁴¹⁵ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Wilson*, Slip Op. No. 2022-0425, 2024-Ohio-182.
- ⁴¹⁶ R.C. 149.433(D).
- ⁴¹⁷ R.C. 149.433(A).
- ⁴¹⁸ *McDougald v. Greene*, 162 Ohio St.3d 250, 2020-Ohio-4268, ¶ 8.
- ⁴¹⁹ R.C. 149.433(A); *State ex rel. Rogers v. Dept. of Rehab. and Corr.*, 155 Ohio St.3d 545, 2018-Ohio-5111, ¶ 11-13 (prison security video was not an infrastructure record because it only revealed the “spatial relationship” of building features similar to a floor plan); *State ex rel. Ohio Republican Party v. FitzGerald*, 145 Ohio St.3d 92, 2015-Ohio-5056, ¶ 26 (key-card-swipe data of a county executive official that reveals the location of nonpublic, secured entrances is not exempt as an infrastructure record).
- ⁴²⁰ *State ex rel. Rogers v. Dept. of Rehab. & Correction*, 155 Ohio St.3d 545, 2018-Ohio-5111.
- ⁴²¹ R.C. 149.433(D).
- ⁴²² R.C. 1306.23.
- ⁴²³ *State ex rel. Leslie v. Ohio Hous. Fin. Agency*, 105 Ohio St.3d 261, 2005-Ohio-1508, ¶ 19.
- ⁴²⁴ *State ex rel. Leslie v. Ohio Hous. Fin. Agency*, 105 Ohio St.3d 261, 2005-Ohio-1508, ¶ 18.
- ⁴²⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v).
- ⁴²⁶ *State ex rel. Leslie v. Ohio Hous. Fin. Agency*, 105 Ohio St.3d 261, 265, 2005-Ohio-1508, ¶ 21.
- ⁴²⁷ *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 26-31. If challenged in court, attorney-client privilege redactions may need to be supported with specific evidence demonstrating that legal advice was sought and/or received. See *Hinners v. Huron*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00549PQ, 2018-Ohio-3652, ¶ 10, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00549PQ, 2018-Ohio-4362 (general assertions do not meet the burden of proving the elements of attorney-client privilege); but see *White v. Dept. of Rehab. and Corr.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00762PQ, 2019-Ohio-472, ¶ 18-19 (rejecting Special Master’s recommendation because improper standard was applied to privilege review; records “facilitate[d] the rendition of legal services, or advice” under a preponderance of the evidence standard and were therefore properly withheld).
- ⁴²⁸ *State ex rel. Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff, LLP v. Rossford*, 140 Ohio App.3d 149, 156 (6th Dist. 2000).
- ⁴²⁹ *State ex rel. Leslie v. Ohio Hous. Fin. Agency*, 105 Ohio St.3d 261, 2005-Ohio-1508, ¶ 23 (attorney-client privilege applied to communications between state agency personnel and its in-house counsel); *Morgan v. Butler*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. No. 16AP-488, 2017-Ohio-816 (emails between attorneys and their state government clients pertaining to the attorneys’ legal advice are exempt from disclosure).
- ⁴³⁰ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade v. Toledo-Lucas Cty. Port Auth.*, 121 Ohio St.3d 537, 2009-Ohio-1767, ¶ 20-34 (finding that a factual investigation may invoke the attorney-client privilege).
- ⁴³¹ *State ex rel. Thomas v. Ohio State Univ.*, 71 Ohio St.3d 245, 251 (1994); *Assn. of Cleveland Firefighters IAFF Local 93 v. City of Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga App. No. 113029, 2021-Ohio-3602, ¶ 43-45 (communication that would facilitate legal advice is protected, but simply copying an attorney on a communication does not render the communication privileged).
- ⁴³² *State ex rel. Anderson v. Vermilion*, 134 Ohio St.3d 120, 2012-Ohio-5320, ¶ 13-15; *State ex rel. Dawson v. Bloom-Carroll Local School Dist.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 10, 2011-Ohio-6009, ¶ 28-33; *State ex rel. Pietrangelo v. Avon Lake*, 146 Ohio St.3d 292, 2016-Ohio-2974, ¶ 10-17.

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- ⁴³³ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 53; *Civ.R. 26(B)(4)*.
- ⁴³⁴ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 55; see also Chapter Three: F.5.d. “Trial preparation records.”
- ⁴³⁵ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 55.
- ⁴³⁶ *State v. Athon*, 136 Ohio St.3d 43, 2013-Ohio-1956, ¶ 16 (“[O]ur decision in *Steckman* does not bar an accused from obtaining public records that are otherwise available to the public. Although R.C. 149.43 provides an independent basis for obtaining information potentially relevant to a criminal proceeding, it is not a substitute for and does not supersede the requirements of criminal discovery pursuant to Crim.R. 16.”). However, the Public Records Act may not be used to obtain copies of court transcripts of criminal proceedings without complying with the procedure in R.C. 2301.24.
- ⁴³⁷ *State v. Athon*, 136 Ohio St.3d 43, 2013-Ohio-1956, ¶ 18-19 (when a criminal defendant makes a public records request for information that could be obtained from the prosecutor through discovery, this request triggers a reciprocal duty on the part of the defendant to provide discovery as contemplated by Crim.R. 16).
- ⁴³⁸ *Crim.R. 16(H)*.
- ⁴³⁹ *State ex rel. WHIO-TV-7 v. Lowe*, 77 Ohio St.3d 350, 355 (1997).
- ⁴⁴⁰ See Chapter Three: C. “Waiver of a Discretionary Exemption.”
- ⁴⁴¹ See Chapter Three: F. 5. d. “Trial preparation records”; see also Chapter Four: A. “CLEIRs: Confidential Law Enforcement Investigatory Records Exemption.”
- ⁴⁴² *State ex rel. WHIO-TV-7 v. Lowe*, 77 Ohio St.3d 350, 354-55 (1997).
- ⁴⁴³ *Gilbert v. Summit Cty.*, 104 Ohio St.3d 660, 661-62, 2004-Ohio-7108.
- ⁴⁴⁴ *Cockshutt v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, No. 2:13-cv-532, 2013 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 113293, at *13 (S.D. Ohio Aug. 9, 2013).
- ⁴⁴⁵ *State ex rel. TP Mech. Contractors, Inc. v. Franklin Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 09AP-235, 2009-Ohio-3614, ¶ 13.
- ⁴⁴⁶ *Evid.R. 803(8)*; *State v. Scurti*, 153 Ohio App.3d 183, 2003-Ohio-3286, ¶ 15 (7th Dist.).
- ⁴⁴⁷ *Gilbert v. Summit Cty.*, 104 Ohio St.3d 660, 2004-Ohio-7108, ¶ 13-14 (Stratton, J. concurring).
- ⁴⁴⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(4).
- ⁴⁴⁹ *Frank R. Recker & Assocs. Co. LPA, v. Ohio State Dental Bd.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00381PQ, 2019-Ohio-3268, ¶ 13, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00381PQ, 2019-Ohio-3678 (surveys created with the help of counsel and in reasonable anticipation of litigation qualified as trial preparation records even though the public office also used them for non-litigation purposes).
- ⁴⁵⁰ *Cleveland Clinic Found. v. Levin*, 120 Ohio St.3d 1210, 2008-Ohio-6197, ¶ 10.
- ⁴⁵¹ *State ex rel. Nix v. Cleveland*, 83 Ohio St.3d 379, 384-85 (1998).
- ⁴⁵² *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 47.
- ⁴⁵³ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 49 (interviews conducted before the filing of a criminal complaint were not trial preparation records); see also *Bentkowski v. Trafis*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 102540, 2015-Ohio-5139, ¶ 27 (trial preparation records exemption inapplicable to records of a police investigation when the police had closed the investigation; no crime was charged or even contemplated, and thus trial was not reasonably anticipated).
- ⁴⁵⁴ *Hodge v. Montgomery Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-01111PQ, 2020-Ohio-4520, ¶ 13, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-01111PQ, 2020-Ohio-4904.
- ⁴⁵⁵ Chapter Five: B. “Court Records.”
- ⁴⁵⁶ *State ex rel. Vindicator Printing Co. v. Watkins*, 66 Ohio St.3d 129, 137-38 (1993) (prohibiting disclosure of pretrial court records prejudicing rights of criminal defendant); *Adams v. Metallica, Inc.*, 143 Ohio App.3d 482, 493-95 (1st Dist. 2001) (applying balancing test to determine whether prejudicial record should be released when filed with the court); but see *State ex rel. Highlander v. Rudduck*, 103 Ohio St.3d 370, 2004-Ohio-4952, ¶ 9-20 (pending appeal from court order unsealing divorce records does not preclude writ of mandamus claim).
- ⁴⁵⁷ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Dinkelacker*, 144 Ohio App.3d 725, 730-33 (1st Dist. 2001) (trial judge was required to determine whether release of records would jeopardize defendant’s right to a fair trial).
- ⁴⁵⁸ R.C. 2953.32; R.C. 2953.33; R.C. 2953.34; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Winkler*, 101 Ohio St.3d 382, 2004-Ohio-1581, ¶ 4-13 (affirming trial court’s sealing order per R.C. 2953.52 [renumbered as R.C. 2943.33]); *Dream Fields, LLC v. Bogart*, 175 Ohio App.3d 165, 2008-Ohio-152, ¶ 5-6 (1st Dist.) (unless a court record contains information that is exempt as a public record, it shall not be sealed and shall be available for public inspection; “[j]ust because the parties have agreed that they want the records sealed is not enough to justify the sealing”); see also Chapter Five: B. “Court Records.”
- ⁴⁵⁹ *Mayfield Hts. v. M.T.S.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 100842, 2014-Ohio-4088, ¶ 8.
- ⁴⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Frank v. Clermont Cty. Prosecutor*, 164 Ohio St.3d 522, 2021-Ohio-623, ¶ 21 (prosecutor’s response, “This does not preclude the possibility of unlisted arrests, expunged records or criminal investigation information with this or other departments” was sufficient when denying public records request); *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 6, 9, 38, 43 (response, “There is no information available” was a violation of the R.C. 149.43(B)(3) requirement to provide a sufficient explanation, with legal authority, for the denial); but see R.C. 2953.36(F)(2) (“upon any inquiry” for expunged records of human trafficking victims, the court “shall reply that no record exists”).
- ⁴⁶¹ *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235, ¶ 27; but see *State ex rel. Highlander v. Rudduck*, 103 Ohio St.3d 370, 2004-Ohio-4952, ¶ 1 (divorce records were not properly sealed when an order results from “unwritten and informal court policy”).
- ⁴⁶² *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235, ¶ 27.
- ⁴⁶³ *State v. Boykin*, 138 Ohio St.3d 97, 2013-Ohio-4582, syllabus.
- ⁴⁶⁴ *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235, ¶ 37.
- ⁴⁶⁵ *Crim.R. 6(E)*.
- ⁴⁶⁶ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal v. Waters*, 67 Ohio St.3d 321, 327 (1993); *Crim.R. 6*.
- ⁴⁶⁷ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Morrow Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 105 Ohio St.3d 172, 2005-Ohio-685, ¶ 5; *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Petro*, 80 Ohio St.3d 261, 267 (1997).
- ⁴⁶⁸ *Krouse v. Ohio State Univ.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00988PQ, 2018-Ohio-5014, ¶ 9, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00988PQ, 2018-Ohio-5013.
- ⁴⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Dupuis*, 98 Ohio St.3d 126, 2002-Ohio-7041, ¶ 11-21; *State ex rel. Kinsley v. Berea Bd. of Edn.*, 64 Ohio App.3d 659, 663 (8th Dist. 1990).
- ⁴⁷⁰ *State ex rel. Sun Newspapers v. Westlake Bd. of Edn.*, 76 Ohio App.3d 170, 173 (8th Dist. 1991); *Smith v. Ohio State Univ. Office of Compliance & Integrity*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00400PQ, 2022-Ohio-2657, ¶ 20-22 (ordering production of settlement agreement between university and victims, but not privileged communications relating to implementation of the agreement); see also Chapter Three: F.5.a. “Attorney-client privilege.”
- ⁴⁷¹ *Keller v. Columbus*, 100 Ohio St.3d 192, 2003-Ohio-5599, ¶ 20; *State ex rel. Findlay Publishing Co. v. Hancock Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 80 Ohio St.3d 134, 136-37 (1997); *Zamlen-Spotts v. Cleveland State Univ.*, Ct. of Cl. Case No. 2021-00087PQ, 2021-Ohio-2704, ¶ 17, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00087PQ, 2021-Ohio-3128 (contractual promise cannot alter public nature of records); see also Chapter Three: A.1. “Contracts cannot create exemptions.”
- ⁴⁷² *Prof. Cond. Adv. Op. 2013-13*.
- ⁴⁷³ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Univ. of Toledo Found.*, 65 Ohio St.3d 258, 264 (1992).
- ⁴⁷⁴ See, e.g., *State ex rel. Besser v. Ohio State Univ.*, 87 Ohio St.3d 535, 543 (2000) (a public entity can have its own trade secrets); *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 76 Ohio St.3d 1224, 1225 (1996) (resumes are not trade secrets of a private consultant); *State ex rel.*

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Rea v. Ohio Dept. of Edn., 81 Ohio St.3d 527, 533 (1998) (proficiency tests are public record after they have been administered); *State ex rel. Perrea v. Cincinnati Pub. Schools*, 123 Ohio St.3d 410, 2009-Ohio-4762, ¶ 32-33 (public school established that certain semester examination records exempt as trade secrets); *State ex rel. Am. Ctr. for Economic Equality v. Jackson*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 102298, 2015-Ohio-4981, ¶ 41-48 (document containing list of names and email addresses was exempt as trade secrets); *Salemi v. Cleveland Metroparks*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 100761, 2014-Ohio-3914, ¶ 12, 14-23 (customer lists and marketing plan of public golf course were exempt from disclosure as trade secrets).

⁴⁷⁵ *R.C. 1333.61(D)* (adopting the Uniform Trade Secrets Act); see also *R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(m)*; *R.C. 149.43(A)(5)*.

⁴⁷⁶ *Fred Siegel Co., L.P.A. v. Arter & Hadden*, 85 Ohio St.3d 171, 181 (1999) (finding that time, effort, or money expended in developing law firm's client list, as well as amount of time and expense it would take for others to acquire and duplicate it, may be among factfinder's considerations in determining if that information qualifies as a trade secret).

⁴⁷⁷ *State ex rel. Besser v. Ohio State Univ.*, 89 Ohio St.3d 396, 400 (2000).

⁴⁷⁸ *State ex rel. Besser v. Ohio State Univ.*, 89 Ohio St.3d 396, 399-400 (2000); *State ex rel. Luken v. Corp. for Findlay Market*, 135 Ohio St.3d 416, 2013-Ohio-1532, ¶ 19-25 (information met the two requirements of *Besser* because sublease rental terms had independent economic value and corporation made reasonable efforts to maintain secrecy of information); *Salemi v. Cleveland Metroparks*, 145 Ohio St.3d 408, 2016-Ohio-1192, ¶ 27-30 (applying the *Besser* factors, customer lists and marketing plan of Metroparks' public golf course were trade secrets because: (1) the information was not available to the public or contractual partners, (2) the golf course took measures to protect the list from disclosure and limited employee access, (3) the customer list was of economic value to the golf course, and (4) the golf course expended money and effort in collecting and maintaining the information).

⁴⁷⁹ *State ex rel. Besser v. Ohio State Univ.*, 89 Ohio St.3d 396, 399-400 (2000).

⁴⁸⁰ *State ex rel. Allright Parking of Cleveland, Inc. v. Cleveland*, 63 Ohio St.3d 772, 776 (1992) (*in camera* inspection may be necessary to determine whether disputed records contain trade secrets).

⁴⁸¹ *State ex rel. Plain Dealer v. Ohio Dept. of Ins.*, 80 Ohio St.3d 513, 527 (1997); see also Chapter Three: A.1. "Contracts cannot create exemptions."

⁴⁸² See, e.g., *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400 (1997) (contract provision between city and outside search firm making resumes and application materials confidential is void as a matter of law); see also Chapter Three: A.1. "Contracts cannot create exemptions."

⁴⁸³ 17 U.S.C. § 102(a).

⁴⁸⁴ 17 U.S.C. § 102(a)(1)-(8).

⁴⁸⁵ 17 U.S.C. § 102(a).

⁴⁸⁶ 17 U.S.C. § 107; *Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. v. Nation Enterprises*, 471 U.S. 539, 560-61 (1985) (in determining whether the intended use of the protected work is "fair use," a court must consider these facts, which are not exclusive: (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether the intended use is commercial or for non-profit educational purposes; (2) the nature of the protected work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the most important factor—the effect of the intended use upon the market for or value of the protected work); *State ex rel. Gambill v. Opperman*, 135 Ohio St.3d 298, 2013-Ohio-761, ¶ 25 (because engineer's office cannot separate requested raw data from copyrighted and exempt software, nonexempt records are not subject to disclosure to the extent they are inseparable from copyrighted software).

⁴⁸⁷ *R.C. 5120.21 (A)-(C)*.

⁴⁸⁸ *R.C. 5120.21(F)*; *State ex rel. Mobley v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 169 Ohio St.3d 39, 2022-Ohio-1765, ¶ 17-22.

⁴⁸⁹ *State ex rel. Mobley v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 169 Ohio St.3d 39, 2022-Ohio-1765, ¶ 16-23; *State ex rel. Sultaana v. Mansfield Corr. Inst.*, 172 Ohio St.3d 438, 2023-Ohio-1177, ¶ 32 (incident and conduct reports did not fall under any category in *R.C. 5120.21* and not exempt).

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IV. Chapter Four: Law Enforcement Records

This Chapter addresses issues and exemptions that apply to law enforcement related records and to law enforcement officers, as well as issues and exemptions that apply to crime victims or witnesses. The general principles of public records obligations and enforcement discussed in this Manual apply to these records as they do to all other types of records.

There are both discretionary and mandatory exemptions that apply to law enforcement records. Discretionary exemptions allow law enforcement offices to choose to release the records. Mandatory exemptions prohibit offices from releasing certain types of records or information in records in response to a public records request, and civil or criminal penalties may be imposed for improper release. As with all other types of records, courts will interpret the exemptions addressed in this Chapter narrowly, and the public office has the burden to establish that the exemption applies. For a more in-depth discussion of exemptions in general, refer to Chapter Three, “Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records.”

A. *CLEIRs: Confidential Law Enforcement Investigatory Records Exemption*

The Confidential Law Enforcement Investigatory Records exemption, commonly known as “CLEIRs,” is a discretionary exemption that law enforcement offices encounter frequently. CLEIRs applies to (1) records that pertain to a law enforcement matter of a criminal, quasi-criminal, civil, or administrative nature, *and* (2) when disclosure of the records would reveal one of five categories of information.⁴⁹⁰ Each element involves a separate analysis, and *both* must be satisfied for the exemption to apply.

1. *Step one: pertains to “a law enforcement matter”*

The first step to determine if the CLEIRs exemption applies is whether the record pertains to a law enforcement matter of a criminal, quasi-criminal, civil, or administrative nature. An investigation is only considered a “law enforcement matter” if it meets each prong of the following three-part test:

a. *Has an investigation been initiated upon specific suspicion of wrongdoing?*

Records must be generated in response to specific alleged misconduct for CLEIRs to apply. Thus, records that offices routinely generate, such as personnel records, are generally not considered investigation records.⁴⁹¹ Use-of-force reports are not categorically treated as investigation records for purposes of CLEIRs because law enforcement offices must create these reports for every use-of-force incident, even if the office does not suspect misconduct.⁴⁹² However, if there is evidence of “specific suspicion of criminal wrongdoing” related to a use-of-force incident, the use-of-force report may qualify as an investigation record.⁴⁹³

b. *Does the alleged conduct violate criminal, quasi-criminal, civil, or administrative law?*

If the record involves criminal conduct, this element is met. But in addition to criminal law enforcement matters, CLEIRs applies to quasi-criminal, civil, and administrative law enforcement matters when there is statutory authority to enforce a law.⁴⁹⁴ To satisfy this element the matter must directly relate to “the enforcement of the law, and not to employment or personnel matters ancillary to law enforcement matters.”⁴⁹⁵ Thus, disciplinary investigations of alleged violations of internal office policies or procedures are *not* law enforcement matters,⁴⁹⁶ including disciplinary actions against law enforcement officers.⁴⁹⁷

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c. Does the public office have the authority to investigate or enforce the law allegedly violated?

The public office must have legally-mandated investigative⁴⁹⁸ or enforcement authority over the alleged violation of the law for the records it holds to pertain to a “law enforcement matter.”⁴⁹⁹ For example, if an investigating law enforcement agency obtains a copy of an otherwise public record of another public office as part of an investigation, the original record remaining in the hands of the other public office is not covered by the CLEIRs exemption.⁵⁰⁰

2. Step two: high probability of disclosing certain information

If step one is satisfied—the investigative record pertains to a “law enforcement matter”—the second step must be satisfied for CLEIRs to apply: releasing the record would create a high probability of disclosing one or more of five types of information.⁵⁰¹ The five types of information are:

a. Identity of an uncharged suspect in connection with the investigated conduct

An “uncharged suspect” is a person who at some point in the investigatory agency’s investigation was believed to have committed a crime or offense but was not arrested or charged for the offense to which the investigative record pertains.⁵⁰² This exemption is intended to protect the rights of individuals to be free from unwarranted adverse publicity, and to protect law enforcement investigations from being compromised.⁵⁰³

Only the particular information that has a high probability of revealing the identity of an uncharged suspect can be redacted from otherwise non-exempt records prior to the records’ release.⁵⁰⁴ When the contents of a record are so “inextricably intertwined” with the suspect’s identity that redacting will fail to protect the person’s identity, that entire record may be withheld.⁵⁰⁵ However, the application of this exemption to some records does not automatically create a blanket exemption covering all other records in an investigation file, and the public office must still release any investigative records that do not individually have a high probability of revealing the uncharged suspect’s identity.⁵⁰⁶ Additionally, this exemption does not categorically cover police officer use-of-force reports; rather, a case-by-case assessment should be made to determine if the exemption applies.⁵⁰⁷

The uncharged suspect exemption may apply even if time has passed since the investigation was closed,⁵⁰⁸ the suspect has been accurately identified in media coverage,⁵⁰⁹ or the uncharged suspect is the person requesting the information.⁵¹⁰

b. Identity of a confidential source or witness

For purposes of the CLEIRs exemption, confidential sources or witnesses are those who have been “reasonably promised” confidentiality.⁵¹¹ A promise of confidentiality is considered reasonable if it was made on the basis of the law enforcement investigator’s determination that the promise is necessary to obtain the information.⁵¹² When possible, it is advisable – though not required – that the investigator document the specific reasons why promising confidentiality was necessary to further the investigation.⁵¹³ Promises of confidentiality contained in policy statements or given as a matter of course during routine administrative procedures are not “reasonable” promises of confidentiality for purposes of the CLEIRs exemption.⁵¹⁴

This exemption applies to protect the identity of the information source, not the information he or she provides.⁵¹⁵ However, when the contents of a record are so inextricably intertwined with the confidential source’s identity that redacting will fail to protect the person’s identity in connection with

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the investigated conduct, the identifying material within a record, or even the entire record, may be withheld.⁵¹⁶

c. Specific confidential investigatory techniques or procedures

The exemption for specific confidential investigatory techniques or procedures primarily applies to forensic laboratory testing and results. These include results from trace metal tests⁵¹⁷ and autopsy reports.⁵¹⁸ One purpose of the exemption is to avoid compromising the effectiveness of proprietary and confidential investigative methods.⁵¹⁹

As with other types of exemptions, the office asserting this exemption has the burden of showing that the information fits squarely within the exemption. This generally means that the office must show why the techniques or procedures are unique or require protection. For example, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that this exemption did not apply to witness interviews in an assault prosecution.⁵²⁰ The prosecutors asserted that interviewing assault victims is a “sensitive issue” that “requires special techniques” to understand the victim’s mindset. However, the prosecutors failed to articulate the specific technique at issue or explain why such a technique must remain confidential.

Similarly, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that the exemption did not apply to a map that officers made that showed the territories of gangs and where certain gangs operated in the area.⁵²¹ The Court said that the deciding issue is whether the map itself revealed confidential investigatory techniques or procedures, not necessarily the officers’ thought process that went into making the map.

d. Investigatory work product

“Investigatory work product” is defined as information, including notes, working papers, memoranda, or similar materials, assembled in connection with a probable or pending criminal proceeding.⁵²² A criminal proceeding is probable or highly probable if it’s clear that a crime was committed.⁵²³ In one case the Supreme Court of Ohio held that only 90 seconds from over two hours of dashboard camera recordings was covered as investigatory work product.⁵²⁴ The Court explained that the department policy required troopers to record all pursuits and traffic stops, regardless if a criminal prosecution may follow. Thus, most of the recording was routine, not assembled in connection with an actual or highly probably criminal case. However, the 90 seconds showing a patrol officer taking the suspect to the patrol car, reading his Miranda rights, and questioning him, constituted investigatory work product. By informing the suspect of his Miranda rights, the officer intended to secure admissible statements for use in a criminal prosecution.

Copies of otherwise public records gathered by a law enforcement investigator from a separate public office may be exempted in the investigator’s file as specific investigatory work product, although public records gathered from the investigator’s own public office or governmental subdivision generally do not lose the public records “cloak.”⁵²⁵ These materials may be protected even when they appear in a law enforcement office’s file other than the investigative file.⁵²⁶

While information in a prosecutor’s file may contain records or information that are considered investigatory work product, the exemption does not extend to cover attorney work product. Rather, attorney work product is only protected to the extent it constitutes trial preparation records as defined in R.C. 149.43(A)(4).⁵²⁷ Also, the investigatory work product exemption is not waived when a criminal defendant is provided discovery materials as required by law.⁵²⁸ However, simply because a document or record is kept in a prosecutor’s file does not mean the document or record is covered by the exemption. For example, courts have held that the following are not covered by the investigatory work product exemption even though they were kept in the prosecutors’ files: copies of newspaper articles and statutes;⁵²⁹ copies of an indictment, transcripts of a plea hearing, and a campaign committee finance report filed with the board of elections.⁵³⁰

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Law enforcement offices must pay careful attention to the information in routine offense and incident reports, and narratives that may be attached to the reports. Generally, routine offense and incident reports are not considered part of an investigation and thus not covered under CLEIRs. These are typically “form reports in which the law enforcement officer completing the form enters information in the spaces provided.”⁵³¹ When an officer is completing an offense or incident report he or she is gathering information that may *initiate* an investigation, but the investigation itself has not started.⁵³² The Supreme Court of Ohio characterized this information as “incident information,” which may include information such as an officer’s initial observations or witness interviews.⁵³³

In determining what information qualifies as “incident information,” law enforcement offices must look at the content of the information, not the title of the report in which the information appears. “Incident information” is not exempt under CLEIRs no matter where it appears in an officer’s report. Thus, even if “incident information” is included in a supplemental narrative, it is not exempt under CLEIRs and must be produced.⁵³⁴ However, information that’s collected after an investigation is underway may be withheld under CLEIRs as investigatory work product.

This analysis will turn on the facts and circumstances of each case. Offices should carefully assess the type of information in each part of a report and when it was created to determine what information may be exempt as investigatory work product.

Importantly, the investigatory work product exemption is *time limited*. When a law enforcement matter ends, the exemption ends. The Supreme Court of Ohio held that the investigatory work product exemption does not extend past the end of the trial for which the information was gathered.⁵³⁵ However, courts have held that investigatory records that continue to fall under the uncharged suspect,⁵³⁶ confidential source or witness,⁵³⁷ confidential investigatory technique,⁵³⁸ and information threatening physical safety⁵³⁹ exemptions, apply *despite* the passage of time.

e. Information that would endanger life or physical safety if released

Information that would endanger the life or physical safety of law enforcement personnel, a crime victim, a witness, or a confidential informant, may be exempt under CLEIRs.⁵⁴⁰ The threat to safety need not be specified within the four corners of the investigative file; but bare allegations or assumed conclusions that a person’s physical safety is threatened are insufficient reasons to redact information.⁵⁴¹ Alleging that disclosing the information would infringe on a person’s privacy does not justify a denial of release under this exemption.⁵⁴²

3. Law enforcement records not covered by CLEIRs

a. Routine offense and incident reports

As addressed in the section on “Investigatory Work Product” above, routine offense and incident reports are generally not considered part of an investigation and thus not covered under CLEIRs. However, offices must analyze the information in offense and incident reports, as well as any supplemental narratives attached to the reports, to determine if the information is “incident information.” “Incident information” is not exempt under CLEIRs. Supplemental narratives containing “incident information” such as initial observations or initial witness interviews, may be considered part of an initial incident report and subject to disclosure depending on the nature of the content and when it was created.⁵⁴³ Additionally, not all reports utilized by law enforcement are considered “offense” or “incident” reports. In some circumstances, use-of-force reports may not be incident reports and may be covered by the CLEIRs exemption.⁵⁴⁴

However, if an offense or incident report contains information that is otherwise exempt from disclosure under state or federal law, the exempt information may be redacted.⁵⁴⁵ This could include

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social security numbers, information referred from a children services agency, or information subject to other independently applicable exemptions.⁵⁴⁶

b. 911 call records

The CLEIRs exemption does not apply to transcripts and recordings of 911 calls. The Supreme Court of Ohio explained that 911 operators are not investigating; they are compiling information to determine the appropriate emergency service provider response.⁵⁴⁷ Further, there is no basis to find a constitutional right of privacy in such calls, so even social security numbers may not be redacted.⁵⁴⁸ However, information concerning telephone numbers, addresses, or names obtained from a 911 database maintained pursuant to R.C. 128.96 may not be disclosed or used for any purpose other than as permitted in that section.⁵⁴⁹

B. Other Discretionary Exemptions Encountered in Law Enforcement

There are numerous discretionary exemptions—exemptions that give a public office the choice to withhold or release records or information in records—that may apply to law enforcement related records. The exemptions discussed below are examples of discretionary exemptions that law enforcement offices may encounter. This list is not exhaustive. Refer to Chapter Three, “Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records,” and Chapter Five, “Other Categories of Records,” for additional examples, as well as [Appendix A](#) of this Manual.

1. Body-worn and dashboard camera recordings

Footage from body-worn and dashboard cameras are public records. If a law enforcement office receives a request for body-worn or dashboard camera recordings, the office must conduct a careful review of the footage to determine if any of the footage is exempt from disclosure. In one case the Supreme Court of Ohio held that only 90 seconds from over two hours of dashboard camera recordings could be redacted before release.⁵⁵⁰

However, the Public Records Act lists 17 types of information that are considered “restricted portions” of body-worn or dashboard camera footage that can be withheld or redacted before disclosure.⁵⁵¹ The restricted portions of the footage are any visual or audio portion of the recording that “shows, communicates or discloses” one or more of the following:⁵⁵²

- (1) The image or identity of a child or information that could lead to the identification of a child who is the primary subject of the recording;
- (2) The death of a person or deceased person’s body, unless the death was caused by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or peace officer or under certain other circumstances;
- (3) The death of a correctional employee, youth services employee, peace officer or first responder that occurs when the decedent was performing official duties;
- (4) Grievous bodily harm unless the injury was effected by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or a peace officer;
- (5) An act of severe violence against a person that results in serious physical harm unless the injury was effected by a correctional employee, youth services employee, or peace officer;
- (6) Grievous bodily harm to, or an act of severe violence resulting in serious physical harm, against a correctional employee, youth services employee, peace officer,

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firefighter, paramedic, or other first responder while the injured person was performing official duties;

- (7) An act of severe violence that results in serious physical harm against a correctional employee, youth services employee, peace officer, firefighter, paramedic, or other first responder, occurring while the injured person was engaged in the performance of official duties;
- (8) A person's nude body;
- (9) Protected health information, the identity of a person in a health care facility who is not the subject of a law enforcement encounter, or any other information in a health care facility that could identify a person who is not the subject of a law enforcement encounter;
- (10) Information that could identify the alleged victim of a sex offense, menacing by stalking, or domestic violence;
- (11) Information that does not qualify as a confidential law enforcement investigatory record that could identify a confidential source if disclosure of the source or the information provided could reasonably be expected to threaten or endanger a person's safety or property;
- (12) A person's personal information who is not arrested, charged, or issued a written warning;
- (13) Proprietary police contingency plans or tactics that are intended to prevent crime and maintain public order and safety;
- (14) Personal conversations between peace officers unrelated to work;
- (15) Conversations between peace officers and members of the public that do not concern law enforcement activities;
- (16) The interior of a residence unless it is the location of an adversarial encounter with, or use of force by, a peace officer; or
- (17) The interior of a private business not open to the public unless it is the location of an adversarial encounter with, or use of force by, a peace officer.

Restricted portions of body-worn or dashboard camera recordings described in numbers (2)-(8) above may be released with the consent of the injured person, the decedent's executor or administrator or the person/person's guardian if the recording will not be used in connection with any probable or pending criminal proceeding or the recording has been used in connection with a criminal proceeding that was dismissed or for which a judgment has been entered pursuant to Rule 32 of the Rules of Criminal Procedure, and will not be used again in connection with any probably or pending criminal proceedings.⁵⁵³

If a person has been denied access to a restricted portion of a body-worn or dashboard camera recording, that person may file a mandamus action or a complaint with the clerk of the Court of Claims, seeking an order to release the recording. The court shall order the release of the recording if it determines that the public interest in the recording substantially outweighs privacy and other interests asserted to deny release.⁵⁵⁴

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2. EMS run sheets

When a run sheet created and maintained by a county emergency medical services (EMS) organization documents treatment of a living patient, the EMS organization may redact information that pertains to the patient's medical history, diagnosis, prognosis, or medical condition.⁵⁵⁵ However, a patient's name, address, and other non-medical personal information does not fall under the "medical records" exemption in R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a) and may not be redacted unless some other exemption applies to that information.⁵⁵⁶ Accordingly, each run sheet must be examined to determine whether it falls, in whole or in part, within the "medical records" exemption, the physician-patient privilege, or any other exemption for information the release of which is prohibited by law.⁵⁵⁷

3. Juvenile law enforcement records

As addressed in Chapter Three: F.2., "Juvenile records," there is no exemption that protects all juvenile records from public records disclosure. Juvenile offender investigation records maintained by law enforcement agencies, in general, are treated no differently than adult records, including records identifying a juvenile suspect, victim, or witness in an initial incident report.⁵⁵⁸ Specific exemptions apply to: (1) fingerprints, photographs, and related information in connection with specified juvenile arrest or custody;⁵⁵⁹ (2) certain information forwarded from a children's services agency;⁵⁶⁰ and (3) sealed or expunged juvenile records.⁵⁶¹ Most information held by local law enforcement offices may be shared with other law enforcement agencies and some may be shared with a board of education upon request.⁵⁶²

Federal law similarly prohibits disclosing specified records associated with federal juvenile delinquency proceedings.⁵⁶³ Federal law also restricts disclosing fingerprints and photographs of a juvenile found guilty in federal delinquency proceedings of committing a crime that would have been a felony if the juvenile were prosecuted as an adult.⁵⁶⁴

4. Other discretionary exemptions

Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission certifications exams	R.C. 109.75(L)	Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission certification exams, either before or after completion. NOTE: the results of certification exams are public records.
Probation/parole/post-release control	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(b)	Records pertaining to probation and parole proceedings or proceedings related to the imposition of community control sanctions, ⁵⁶⁵ post-release control sanctions, ⁵⁶⁶ or to proceedings related to determinations under R.C. 2967.271 regarding the release or continued incarceration of an offender to whom that section applies. Examples of records covered by this exemption include pre-sentence investigation reports, ⁵⁶⁷ records relied on to compile a pre-sentence investigation report, ⁵⁶⁸ documents reviewed by the Parole Board in preparation for a parole hearing; ⁵⁶⁹ and records of parole proceedings. ⁵⁷⁰

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Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
DNA records	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(j)	DNA records stored in the state DNA database under R.C. 109.573. NOTE: the results of DNA tests of an inmate who obtains post-conviction testing are not exempt under R.C. 2953.81(B).
Inmate records	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(k)	Inmate records released by the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to the Department of Youth Services or a court of record under R.C. 5120.21(E).
Lethal injection	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(cc)	Information and records concerning drugs used for lethal injections under R.C. 2949.221(B) and (C).
Military orders	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ff)	Orders for active military service of an individual serving or with previous service in the U.S. armed forces, including a reserve component, or the Ohio organized militia.
Victim and witness telephone numbers	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(mm)	Telephone numbers of victims and witnesses to a crime listed on a law enforcement record or report.
Motor vehicle accident telephone numbers	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(oo)	Telephone numbers of parties to a motor vehicle accident listed on a law enforcement record or report within 30 days of the accident.
Photographs of undercover officers	R.C. 149.43(A)(7)(g)	Photographs of peace officers with undercover or plain clothes positions or assignments.
Security records	R.C. 149.433(A)(1)-(2)	Information directly used for protecting or maintaining the security of a public office against attack, interference, or sabotage; or to prevent, mitigate, or respond to acts of terrorism. Refer to Chapter Three: F.4.a. "Security records," for additional discussion of this exemption.
Infrastructure records	R.C. 149.433(B)(2)-(3)	Information that discloses the configuration of a public office's critical systems. Refer to Chapter Three: F.4.b. "Infrastructure records," for additional discussion of this exemption.
Autopsy photos	R.C. 313.10(D)	Autopsy photos of the decedent. NOTE: a journalist may, upon written request, inspect these records but cannot copy them.
Security of electronic records	R.C. 1306.23	Information that would jeopardize the state's continued use or security of any computer or telecommunications devices or services associated with electronic signatures, electronic records, or electronic transactions.

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Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
Name of person making report of abuse	R.C. 2151.421(I)(1)	Report made by someone with knowledge of child abuse or neglect to either the public children services agency or a peace officer in the county in which the child resides; includes the name of the person who made the report.
Disclosure of officer's home address in pending criminal case	R.C. 2921.24(A)	Home addresses of any peace officer, parole officer, prosecuting attorney, assistant prosecuting attorney, correctional employee, or youth services employee who is a witness or arresting officer in a pending criminal case.
Disclosure of officer's home address during examination in court	R.C. 2921.25(A)	A peace officer, parole officer, prosecuting attorney, assistant prosecuting attorney, correctional employee, or youth services employee cannot be required to disclose their home address during examination in a criminal court case, unless court determines defendant has a right to the disclosure.
Sealed court records	R.C. 2953.52	Court records relating to criminal convictions that have been properly expunged or sealed.
State Highway Patrol accident reports	R.C. 5502.12	State Highway Patrol reports, statements, and photographs related to accidents it investigates.
Grand Jury records	Crim.R. 6(E)	Deliberations of grand jury and vote of a grand juror.
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) trace reports	Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 108-477, 118 Stat. 2809, 2859 (2004); Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-161, 121 Stat. 2859 (2004)	ATF firearms trace reports. See also <i>Higgins v. U.S. Dept. of Justice</i> , 919 F.Supp.2d 131, 144-45 (D.D.C. 2013).

C. Examples of Mandatory Exemptions Encountered in Law Enforcement

Below are examples of mandatory exemptions that may apply to law enforcement related records. Mandatory exemptions prohibit public offices from releasing certain types of records or information in records, and civil or criminal penalties may be imposed for improper release. This list is not exhaustive. Refer to Chapter Three, "Exemptions to the Required Release of Public Records," and Chapter Five, "Other Categories of Records," for additional examples, as well as [Appendix A](#) of this Manual.

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Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG)	R.C. 109.57(D)(1)(b)	Information, data, statistics, and search audit trails obtained from the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG) database.
Law Enforcement Agencies Databased Systems (LEADS)	R.C. 109.57; and O.A.C. 4501:2-10-06(C)	Information or documents obtained through LEADS; incorporates information obtained through Computerized Criminal History (CCH) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) systems; includes Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI) numbers as a CCH field.
Fingerprints	R.C. 109.57(D)	Fingerprints, fingerprint impressions, and fingerprint cards.
Fingerprint database	R.C. 109.5721(E)	Information in the Retained Applicant Fingerprint Database maintained by BCI.
Certain information BCI receives	109.573(E), (G)	Certain DNA-related records, fingerprints, photographs, and personal information BCI receives.
Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS)	R.C. 4729.80	Information contained in and obtained from the drug database established by the State Board of Pharmacy.

D. Exemptions Applicable to Law Enforcement Officers

Below are examples of exemptions that may apply to law enforcement officers and other covered professionals. Many of these exemptions may apply to records in employee personnel files. These exemptions are not exclusive to law enforcement and apply to other public officials and employees.

This list is not exhaustive. Refer to Chapter Five: A. “Employment Records,” for discussion of additional exemptions that may apply to employment records and personnel files.

1. Background investigations, evaluations, and disciplinary records

There is no exemption that covers background investigation records. Specific statutes may exempt defined background investigation materials kept by specific public offices.⁵⁷¹ For example, criminal history “rap sheets” obtained from the federal National Crime Information Center system (NCIC) or through the state Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) are subject to several statutory exemptions.⁵⁷²

There is also no exemption that covers evaluations and disciplinary records. The CLEIRs exemption does not apply to routine law enforcement discipline or personnel matters, even when such matters are the subject of an internal investigation within a law enforcement agency.⁵⁷³

2. Medical records

The exemption for medical records only applies to records generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment.⁵⁷⁴ However, a separate exemption applies to “medical information” pertaining to those professionals covered under R.C. 149.43(A)(7).⁵⁷⁵

The federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not apply to records in employer personnel files, but the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) may apply to medical-related information in personnel files.

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3. *Physical fitness, psychiatric, and polygraph examinations*

Many law enforcement offices conduct physical fitness examinations, psychiatric or psychological examinations, or polygraph examinations of prospective or current employees. Because the exemption in the Public Records Act for “medical records” is limited to records generated and maintained in the process of medical *treatment*, these types of records generally are not covered by this exemption. Accordingly, records of examinations performed for the purpose of determining fitness for hiring or for continued employment, including psychiatric⁵⁷⁶ and psychological⁵⁷⁷ examinations, are not exempted from disclosure as “medical records.” Similarly, polygraph, or “lie detector” examinations are not “medical records,” and do not fall under the CLEIRs exemption when performed in connection with hiring.⁵⁷⁸

However, federal law may exempt some examinations from disclosure. The federal Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and its implementing regulations⁵⁷⁹ permit employers to require employees and applicants to whom they have offered employment to undergo medical examination and/or inquiry into their ability to perform job-related functions.⁵⁸⁰ Information regarding medical condition or history must be collected and kept on separate forms and in separate medical files and must be treated as confidential, except as otherwise provided by the ADA.⁵⁸¹ These records may be exempted from disclosure under the so-called “catch-all” provision of the Public Records Act as “records the release of which is prohibited by state or federal law.”⁵⁸² As non-public records, the examinations may constitute “confidential personal information” under Ohio’s Personal Information Systems Act.⁵⁸³

4. *Bargaining agreements*

Collective bargaining agreements are public records. Like other contracts and agreements, parties cannot include provisions in collective bargaining agreements that make public records confidential or otherwise contract around public records obligations. Any such provision in a collective bargaining agreement will be invalid.⁵⁸⁴ For example, the Supreme Court of Ohio invalidated a provision of a collective bargaining agreement between a city and its police force that required the city to ensure confidentiality of officers’ personnel records.⁵⁸⁵

5. *Residential and familial information of covered professions*

The Public Records Act exempts from disclosure “residential and familial information” of certain professionals or employees identified in the Act.⁵⁸⁶ For purposes of this section, “covered professions” or “covered employee” describe all persons covered under the exemption. The covered professions and employees include:

- Peace officers⁵⁸⁷
- Correctional employees⁵⁸⁸
- Firefighters⁵⁸⁹
- Emergency service telecommunicators⁵⁹⁰
- County or multicounty corrections officers⁵⁹²
- Forensic mental health providers⁵⁹⁴
- Mental health evaluation providers⁵⁹⁵
- Protective services workers⁵⁹⁶
- Investigators of the Bureau of Identification and Investigation⁵⁹⁸
- Parole officers and probation officers
- Bailiffs
- Prosecutors and assistant prosecutors
- Regional psychiatric hospital employees⁵⁹¹
- Designated Ohio national guard members⁵⁹³
- Judges and magistrates
- State Board of Pharmacy employees
- Federal law enforcement officers⁵⁹⁷
- Community-based correctional facility and youth services employees⁵⁹⁹

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- Medical directors or members of a cooperating employees physician advisory board of an emergency medical service organization
- Emergency medical technicians⁶⁰⁰

“Residential and familial information” means information that discloses any of the following about a covered profession or covered employee:

- Address of the covered employee’s actual personal residence, except for state or political subdivision.⁶⁰¹

NOTE: because prosecuting attorneys and judges are elected officials, the actual personal residential addresses of elected prosecuting attorneys and judges are *not* exempt from disclosure under R.C. 149.43(A)(8)(a)(i).

- Residential address, residential phone number, and emergency phone number of the spouse, former spouse, or child⁶⁰² of a covered employee.⁶⁰³
- Any information of a covered employee that is compiled from referral to or participation in an employee assistance program.⁶⁰⁴
- Any medical information of a covered employee.⁶⁰⁵
- The name of any beneficiary of employment benefits of a covered employee, including, but not limited to, life insurance benefits.⁶⁰⁶
- The identity and amount of any charitable or employment benefit deduction of a covered employee.⁶⁰⁷
- A photograph of a peace officer who holds a position that may include undercover or plain clothes positions or assignments.⁶⁰⁸
- Social security numbers and numbers for bank accounts and debit and credit cards.⁶⁰⁹ This exemption applies to *both* a covered employee and their spouse, former spouse, and children.
- Name, name of employer, and address of employer.⁶¹⁰ This exemption *only* applies to a covered employee’s spouse, former spouse, and children.

The Attorney General has opined that this exemption applies only to records that both 1) contain the information listed in the statute and 2) disclose the relationship of the information to a peace officer or a spouse, former spouse, or child of the peace officer. Further, the exemption applies only to information contained in a record that presents a reasonable expectation of privacy; it does not extend to records kept by a county recorder or other public official for general public access where there is no reasonable basis for asserting a privacy interest and no expectation that the information will be identifiable as peace officer residential and familial information.⁶¹¹

Individuals in these covered professions can also request redaction of their actual residential address from any records made available by public offices to the general public on the internet. A person must make this request in writing on a form developed by the Attorney General.⁶¹² Refer to Chapter Three: F.1.b., “Personal information listed online,” for additional discussion of this provision.

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6. Constitutional right to privacy

A constitutional right of privacy is not a recognized exemption to disclosure of law enforcement officers' identity or information. As explained in more detail in Chapter Three: F.1, "Exemptions affecting personal privacy," courts have recognized an officer's constitutional right to privacy in limited and narrow circumstances. In *Kallstrom v. Columbus*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit recognized the officers' fundamental constitutional rights to personal security and bodily integrity when it held that the Public Records Act did not require disclosure of the officers' personnel files to an attorney representing members of a criminal gang.⁶¹³ Following *Kallstrom*, the Supreme Court of Ohio affirmed a public office's decision to deny the request of a criminal defendant who asked for the personal information of a police officer based on the officer's constitutional right to privacy.⁶¹⁴

E. Exemptions Applicable to Victims and Witnesses

There is no general exemption to public records disclosure for information relating to crime witnesses. Rather, there are exemptions that apply to specific information relating to witnesses. Records relating to crime victims receive additional protection. Not only are there specific statutory exemptions that apply to crime victims, but Marsy's Law enacts confidentiality provisions for certain victims' information in "case documents."

1. Examples of discretionary exemptions applicable to victims and witnesses

Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
Sexual assault examination kits	R.C. 109.68(F)	Information contained in the statewide sexual assault examination kit tracking system.
Death of minor	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(t)	Records and information provided to executive director of a public children services agency or prosecutor regarding the death of a minor from possible abuse, neglect, or other criminal conduct.
Secretary of State's address confidentiality program	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ee)	Name, address, and other personally identifiable information of a participant in the Secretary of State's Address Confidentiality Program under R.C. 111.41-R.C. 111.47.
Depictions of victims by photograph, film, videotape, or printed or digital image	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(ii)	Depictions by photograph, film, videotape, or printed or digital image of either "a victim of an offense the release of which would be, to a reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities, an offensive and objectionable intrusion into the victim's expectation of bodily privacy and integrity" or "captures or depicts the victim of a sexually oriented offense, as defined in section R.C. 2950.01, at the actual occurrence of that offense.
Victim and witness telephone numbers	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(mm)	Telephone numbers of victims and witnesses to a crime listed on a law enforcement record or report.
Marsy's Law	R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(rr)	Records, documents, and information protected under Marsy's Law under R.C. 2930.04 and R.C. 2930.07.

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Type of Record(s)	Authority	Description
Address of petitioner for protective order	R.C. 3113.31(E)(8)(b)	The address of a person who petitions for a civil protective order or agreement, if requested by that person.
Domestic violence shelters	R.C. 3113.36(A)(5)	Information that would identify individuals served by a domestic violence shelter.

2. *Marsy's Law*

The “Marsy’s Law Amendment” to the Ohio Constitution was passed in 2017. The Amendment enshrines certain rights for crime victims and ensures that victims are “treated with fairness and respect for the victim’s safety, dignity, and privacy.”⁶¹⁵ In 2023 the General Assembly codified Marsy’s Law to include provisions that affect confidentiality of victim names, addresses, and other identifying information.⁶¹⁶ The law also specified the types of information that may be redacted from some public records. These provisions apply in specific circumstances and to specific records.

a. *Victims under Marsy's Law*

Under Marsy’s Law a victim is “a person against whom the criminal offense or delinquent act is committed or who is directly and proximately harmed by the commission of the offense or act.”⁶¹⁷ The victim may designate any person to act as his or her representative for purposes of exercising rights under Marsy’s Law.⁶¹⁸ If the victim is a victim of murder, manslaughter, or homicide, a member of the deceased victim’s family, a victim advocate, or another person designated by a member of the deceased victim’s family, may exercise the victim’s rights under Marsy’s Law.⁶¹⁹ If the victim is incapacitated, incompetent, or deceased, and no member of the victim’s family or victim advocate comes forward to act as a representative, a court may appoint a victim advocate or other person the court determines to be appropriate to act as the victim’s representative.⁶²⁰

b. *The victim's rights form*

Marsy’s Law requires that the victim or victim’s representative be given or be notified about a victim’s rights form. This form contains important information for the victim, as well as for law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts that will use the form throughout the criminal process. The victim’s rights form is not a public record under the Public Records Act.⁶²¹

The victim’s rights form tells the victim or victim’s representative what rights they are automatically entitled to under Marsy’s Law and what rights they must request.⁶²² The victim or victim’s representative can choose to exercise all, some, or none of these rights, and can change their decision any time.⁶²³

The victim’s rights form must include:

- (1) A statement that the form itself is not a public record under the Public Records Act;⁶²⁴
- (2) A section that allows the victim or victim’s representative to request that his or her name, address, or other identifying information be redacted from “case documents;”⁶²⁵
- (3) A section that explains that if a victim of “violating a protection order, an offense of violence, or a sexually oriented offense” does not complete the form or request applicable rights at the first contact with law enforcement, it is considered an assertion of the victim’s rights until: (1) the victim completes the form or requests applicable rights, or (2) the prosecutor contacts the victim;⁶²⁶

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- (4) A section that explains that the victim must make a separate request to the Department of Public Safety for redaction of identifying information in motor vehicle accident reports;⁶²⁷ and
- (5) Information about the address confidentiality program.⁶²⁸

c. When a victim's identifying information must be redacted from "case documents"

The victim's identifying information must be redacted from "case documents" if:

- (1) The victim or victim's representative made a written request for the victim's name, address, or other identifying information to be redacted from "case documents";⁶²⁹
- (2) The victim of violating a protection order, an offense of violence, or a sexually oriented offense, or victim's representative, was unable to complete the victim's rights form at the first contact with law enforcement until the victim or victim's representative has initial contact with the prosecutor;⁶³⁰ or
- (3) The victim or victim's representative uses the victim's rights form to request redaction of the victim's identifying information.⁶³¹

Under any of these scenarios, a law enforcement agency, prosecutor's office, or court is prohibited from releasing unredacted "case documents" in response to a public records request.⁶³²

These redaction provisions do not "apply to any disclosure of the name, address, or other identifying information of a victim of a criminal offense or delinquent act that resulted in the death of the victim."⁶³³

d. Case documents

A "case document" is a "document or information in a document, or audio or video recording of a victim of violating a protection order, an offense of violence, or a sexually oriented offense, regarding a case that is submitted to a court, a law enforcement agency or officer, or a prosecutor or filed with a clerk of court[.]"⁶³⁴ This includes, but is not limited to, "pleadings, motions, exhibits, transcripts, orders, and judgments, or any documentation, including audio or video recordings of a victim of violating a protection order, an offense of violence, or a sexually oriented offense, prepared or created by a court, clerk of court, or law enforcement agency or officer, or a prosecutor regarding a case."⁶³⁵

A "case document" does not include materials that are subject to the work product doctrine, privilege, or confidentiality, or otherwise protected or prohibited from disclosure by state or federal law.⁶³⁶

e. Obligations of public offices and public officials

Any public office or official charged with the responsibility of knowing the name, address, or other identifying information of the victim or the victim's representative as part of the office's or official's duties, has full and complete access to this information. The public office or official must take measures to prevent public disclosure of the identifying information of the victim or victim's representative, through the redaction provisions identified above.⁶³⁷

A public agency may maintain unredacted records of the victim or the victim's representative for its own records and use and may allow another public office or official to access the unredacted records.⁶³⁸ The victim, victim's representative, or victim's attorney may also access any unredacted "case documents" with the victim's name, contact information, and identifying information.⁶³⁹

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A criminal defendant may include necessary information about the victim in filings with a court. The victim's name and identifying information in the filings are not a public record if the victim requested that his or her identifying information be redacted from public records.⁶⁴⁰

F. Modified Access to Records for Prison Inmates

As explained in Chapter Two: B. "Statutes that Modify General Rights and Duties," there are several statutes that modify the rights of some requesters to access records. Prison inmates must follow a statutorily-mandated process if requesting records concerning any criminal investigation or prosecution, or a juvenile delinquency investigation that otherwise would be a criminal investigation or prosecution if the subject were an adult.⁶⁴¹ This process applies to both state and federal inmates⁶⁴² and reflects the General Assembly's public-policy decision to restrict a convicted inmate's access to public records, in order to conserve law enforcement resources.⁶⁴³

An inmate may not designate a person to make a public records request on his or her behalf if the inmate would be prohibited from making the request directly.⁶⁴⁴ However, courts should not presume a designee relationship between an inmate and requester merely because the requester is seeking records to benefit the inmate, or because the requester and inmate are related.⁶⁴⁵ Rather, whether a designee relationship exists must be shown with direct evidence.⁶⁴⁶

A public office is not required to produce records concerning a criminal investigation or prosecution in response to an inmate request unless the inmate first obtains a finding from the judge who sentenced or otherwise adjudicated the inmate's case that the information sought is necessary to support what appears to be a justiciable claim, i.e., a pending proceeding with respect to which the requested documents would be material.⁶⁴⁷ The inmate's request must be filed in the inmate's original criminal action, not in a separate, subsequent forfeiture action involving the inmate.⁶⁴⁸ If an inmate requesting public records concerning a criminal prosecution does not follow these requirements, any suit to enforce his or her request will be dismissed.⁶⁴⁹ The appropriate remedy for an inmate who is denied a 149.43(B)(8) order is an appeal of the sentencing judge's findings, not a mandamus action.⁶⁵⁰ One court has concluded that R.C. 2959.26(A)'s requirement that an inmate exhaust inmate grievance procedures before filing any civil action relating to an aspect of institutional life that directly and personally affects an inmate applies to mandamus actions brought to enforce public records requests when those requests concern aspects of institutional life that directly and personally affect the inmate.⁶⁵¹

The criminal investigation records subject to this process when requested by an inmate are broader than those defined under the CLEIRs exemption, and include offense and incident reports.⁶⁵² However, when an inmate seeks other types of records that do not relate to a criminal investigation or prosecution, public offices should treat inmates like any other type of requester.⁶⁵³

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Notes:

⁴⁹⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(2).

⁴⁹¹ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 143, (1995) (polygraph test results, questionnaires, and other materials gathered during a police department's hiring process were not "law enforcement matters" for purposes of CLEIRs).

⁴⁹² *State ex rel. Standifer v. City of Cleveland*, 170 Ohio St.3d 367, 2022-Ohio-3711, ¶ 21 (use of force reports are not categorically considered investigation records for purposes of CLEIRs).

⁴⁹³ *State ex rel. Natl. Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Cleveland*, 38 Ohio St.3d 79, 84, (1988) (CLEIRs exemption does not cover law enforcement investigations routinely conducted in every use of force incident, absent evidence of "specific suspicion of criminal wrongdoing"); *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 10th Dist. Franklin Nos. 04AP-492, 04AP-504, 2005-Ohio-3377, ¶ 77, *rev'd on other grounds*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854 (redacted portions of audit records were directed to specific misconduct and were not simply part of routine monitoring).

⁴⁹⁴ *State ex rel. Oriana House, Inc. v. Montgomery*, 10th Dist. Franklin Nos. 04AP-492, 04AP-504, 2005-Ohio-3377, ¶ 76, *rev'd on other grounds*, 110 Ohio St.3d 456, 2006-Ohio-4854 (special audit conducted by the Auditor of State qualifies as both a "law enforcement matter of a ... civil, or administrative nature" and a "law enforcement matter of a criminal [or] quasi-criminal" matter); *In re Fisher*, 39 Ohio St.2d 71, 75-76 (1974) (juvenile delinquency is an example of a "quasi-criminal" matter); *State ex rel. Polovischak v. Mayfield*, 50 Ohio St.3d 51, 53 (1990) (anti-fraud and anti-corruption investigations are the types of criminal, quasi-criminal or administrative matters to which the CLEIRs exemption may apply because the "records are compiled by the committee in order to investigate matter prohibited by state law and administrative rule"); *State ex rel. Mahajan v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 127 Ohio St.3d 497, 2010-Ohio-5995, ¶ 29 (the reference in the CLEIRs exemption to four types of law enforcement matters – criminal, quasi-criminal, civil, and administrative – "evidences a clear statutory intention to include investigative activities of state licensing boards").

⁴⁹⁵ *State ex rel. Freedom Communications, Inc. v. Elida Community Fire Co.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 578, 581 (1998).

⁴⁹⁶ *State ex rel. Morgan v. City of New Lexington*, 112 Ohio St.3d 33, 2006-Ohio-6365, ¶ 49.

⁴⁹⁷ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 142 (1995) (personnel records reflecting the discipline of police officers were not exempt under CLEIRs).

⁴⁹⁸ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Pike Cty. Coroner's Office*, 153 Ohio St.3d 63, 2017-Ohio-8988, ¶ 34-38 (a coroner may be a law enforcement officer for purposes of CLEIRs because "the nature of a coroner's work in a homicide-related autopsy is investigative and pertains to law enforcement").

⁴⁹⁹ *State ex rel. Strothers v. Wertheim*, 80 Ohio St.3d 155, 158 (1997) (records of alleged child abuse do not pertain to a law enforcement matter in the hands of county ombudsman office that has no legally mandated enforcement or investigative authority).

⁵⁰⁰ *State ex rel. Morgan v. New Lexington*, 112 Ohio St.3d 33, 2006-Ohio-6365, ¶ 51 ("records made in the routine course of public employment before" an investigation began were not covered by CLEIRs); *State ex rel. Dillery v. Icsman*, 92 Ohio St.3d 312, 316 (2001) (street repair records of city's public works superintendent not covered under CLEIRs simply because the records may become relevant to a criminal case); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hamilton Cty.*, 75 Ohio St.3d 374, 378 (1996) (a public record that "subsequently came into the possession and/or control of a prosecutor, other law enforcement officials, or even the grand jury has no significance" because "[o]nce clothed with the public records cloak, the records cannot be defrocked of their status").

⁵⁰¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(2).

⁵⁰² *State ex rel. Musial v. N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 23-24 (a "charge" is a "formal accusation of an offense as a preliminary step to prosecution" and "[a] formal accusation of an offense requires a charging instrument, i.e., an indictment, information, or criminal complaint"); see also *Crim.R. 7*.

⁵⁰³ *State ex rel. Master v. Cleveland*, 76 Ohio St.3d 340, 343 (1996) (citing "avoidance of subjecting persons to adverse publicity where they may otherwise never have been identified with the matter under investigation" and a law enforcement interest in not "compromising subsequent efforts to reopen and solve inactive cases" as two of the purposes of the uncharged suspect exemption).

⁵⁰⁴ *State ex rel. Rocker v. Guernsey Cty. Sheriff's Office*, 126 Ohio St.3d 224, 2010-Ohio-3288, ¶ 11 (the uncharged suspect "exception applies only to those portions of records that, if released, would create a high probability of disclosure of the suspect's identity").

⁵⁰⁵ *State ex rel. Master v. Cleveland*, 76 Ohio St.3d 340, 342 (1996) (records fall under the uncharged suspect exemption when "the protected identities of uncharged suspects are inextricably intertwined with the investigatory records").

⁵⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Rocker v. Guernsey Cty. Sheriff's Office*, 126 Ohio St.3d 224, 2010-Ohio-3288, ¶ 15 (holding that the court of appeals erred in concluding that all records at issue were covered by a "blanket uncharged-suspect exemption"); *Narciso v. Powell Police Dept.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-01195PQ, 2018-Ohio-4590, ¶ 29-30 (uncharged suspect exemption "does not exempt investigatory information about the facts alleged, evidence obtained, investigator activities, and determinations, or any other item that does not disclose the identity of the suspect" or allow a public office to "deny access to the entire investigatory file merely because the request identifies the investigation by the name of the suspect or other person involved").

⁵⁰⁷ *State ex rel. Standifer v. City of Cleveland*, 170 Ohio St.3d 367, 2022-Ohio-3711, ¶ 21.

⁵⁰⁸ *State ex rel. Musial v. N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 28.

⁵⁰⁹ *State ex rel. Rocker v. Guernsey Cty. Sheriff's Office*, 126 Ohio St.3d 224, 2010-Ohio-3288, ¶ 10; *State ex rel. Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Assn. v. Mentor*, 89 Ohio St.3d 440, 447 (2000).

⁵¹⁰ *State ex rel. Musial v. N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 21-29.

⁵¹¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(2)(b).

⁵¹² *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Telb*, 50 Ohio Misc.2d 1, 9, 552 N.E.2d 243 (C.P. 1990).

⁵¹³ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Telb*, 50 Ohio Misc.2d 1, 9, 552 N.E.2d 243 (C.P. 1990); see also *State ex rel. Martin v. Cleveland*, 67 Ohio St.3d 155, 156-57 (1993) (to trigger exemption a promise of confidentiality or a threat to physical safety need not be within the "four corners" of a document).

⁵¹⁴ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Telb*, 50 Ohio Misc.2d 1, 8-9, 552 N.E.2d 243 (C.P. 1990).

⁵¹⁵ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Telb*, 50 Ohio Misc.2d 1, 9, 552 N.E.2d 243 (C.P. 1990).

⁵¹⁶ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Kent State Univ.*, 68 Ohio St.3d 40, 44 (1993), *overruled on other grounds*, 70 Ohio St.3d 420 (1994); *State ex rel. Strothers v. McFaul*, 122 Ohio App.3d 327, 332 (8th Dist.1997).

⁵¹⁷ *State ex rel. Walker v. Balraj*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 77967, 2000 Ohio App. LEXIS 3620 (Aug. 2, 2000) (results of "trace metal test" are exempt as specific investigatory work product).

⁵¹⁸ *State ex rel. Dayton Newspapers, Inc. v. Rauch*, 12 Ohio St.3d 100, 100-01 (1984) (an autopsy report may be exempt as a specific investigatory technique or work product), as modified by *R.C. 313.10*.

⁵¹⁹ *State ex rel. Broom v. Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 59571, 1992 Ohio App. LEXIS 4548 (Aug. 27, 1992) (city properly redacted portions of records that "mention confidential investigatory techniques, the effectiveness of which could be compromised by disclosure," to ensure "continued effectiveness of these techniques"); *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Toledo*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-12-1183, 2013-Ohio-3094, ¶ 10 (release of a gang territory map created by police department would not reveal any specific confidential investigatory technique, procedure, source of information, or location being surveilled).

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- ⁵²⁰ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 44 (law enforcement interviews of assault victims not exempt under CLEIRs as specific investigatory techniques or procedures).
- ⁵²¹ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Toledo*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-12-1183, 2013-Ohio-3094, ¶ 10 (release of a gang territory map created by police department would not reveal any specific confidential investigatory technique, procedure, source of information, or location being surveilled).
- ⁵²² R.C. 149.43(A)(2)(c).
- ⁵²³ *State ex rel. Myers v. Meyers*, 169 Ohio St.3d 536, 2022-Ohio-1915, ¶ 32.
- ⁵²⁴ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ohio Dept. of Public Safety*, 148 Ohio St.3d 433, 2016-Ohio-7987, ¶ 45-50.
- ⁵²⁵ *State ex rel. Community Journal v. Reed*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2014-01-010, 2014-Ohio-5745, ¶ 35-42 (copies of public records documenting the activities of a victim agency, when compiled and assembled by a separate investigating agency, were “specific investigative work product” in the hands of the investigating agency).
- ⁵²⁶ *State ex rel. Mahajan v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 127 Ohio St.3d 497, 2010-Ohio-5995, ¶ 51-52 (regarding investigatory work product incidentally contained in chief enforcement attorney’s general personnel file).
- ⁵²⁷ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 55.
- ⁵²⁸ *State ex rel. WHIO-TV-7 v. Lowe*, 77 Ohio St.3d 350, 355, (1997).
- ⁵²⁹ *State ex rel. Ohio Patrolmen’s Benevolent Assn. v. Mentor*, 89 Ohio St.3d 440, 448 (2000).
- ⁵³⁰ *State ex rel. WLWT-TV5 v. Leis*, 77 Ohio St.3d 357, 361 (1997), *overruled on other grounds*, *State ex rel. Caster v. Columbus*, 151 Ohio St.3d 425, 2016-Ohio-8394, ¶ 47.
- ⁵³¹ *State ex rel. Lanham v. Smith*, 112 Ohio St.3d 527, 2007-Ohio-609, ¶ 13, citing *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Maurer*, 91 Ohio St.3d 54 (2001) (referring to an “Ohio Uniform Incident Form”).
- ⁵³² *State ex rel. Myers v. Meyers*, 169 Ohio St.3d 536, 2022-Ohio-1915, ¶ 40.
- ⁵³³ *State ex rel. Myers v. Meyers*, 169 Ohio St.3d 536, 2022-Ohio-1915, ¶ 44.
- ⁵³⁴ *State ex rel. Myers v. Meyers*, 169 Ohio St.3d 536, 2022-Ohio-1915, ¶ 44-45.
- ⁵³⁵ *State ex rel. Caster v. Columbus*, 151 Ohio St.3d 425, 2016-Ohio-8394, ¶ 47.
- ⁵³⁶ *State ex rel. Musial v. City of N. Olmsted*, 106 Ohio St.3d 459, 2005-Ohio-5521, ¶ 26-28.
- ⁵³⁷ *State ex rel. Polovischak v. Mayfield*, 50 Ohio St.3d 51, 54 (1990) (the purpose of the exemption is to protect a confidential informant, which would be subverted “simply because a period of time had elapsed with no enforcement action”).
- ⁵³⁸ *State ex rel. Broom v. Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 59571, 1992 Ohio App. LEXIS 4548, at *39 (Aug. 27, 1992).
- ⁵³⁹ *State ex rel. Martin v. Cleveland*, 67 Ohio St.3d 155 (1993).
- ⁵⁴⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(2)(d); *State ex rel. Cleveland Police Patrolmen’s Assn. v. Cleveland*, 122 Ohio App.3d 696, 701 (8th Dist. 1997) (a “strike plan” and related records prepared in connection with possible teachers’ strike were exempt because release could endanger lives of police personnel).
- ⁵⁴¹ *State ex rel. Martin v. Cleveland*, 67 Ohio St.3d 155, 156 (1993) (a document does not need to specify within its four corners the promise of confidentiality or threat to physical safety).
- ⁵⁴² See, e.g., *State ex rel. Johnson v. Cleveland*, 65 Ohio St.3d 331, 333-34 (1992), *overruled on other grounds*, *State ex rel. Steckman v. Jackson*, 70 Ohio St.3d 420 (1994).
- ⁵⁴³ *State ex rel. Myers v. Meyers*, 169 Ohio St. 3d 536, 2022-Ohio-1915, ¶ 45.
- ⁵⁴⁴ *State ex rel. Standifer v. City of Cleveland*, 170 Ohio St.3d 367, 2022-Ohio-3711, ¶ 21 (in some cases a use-of-force report could be exempt from disclosure to protect the identity of the subject officer as an uncharged suspect).
- ⁵⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 55 (declining to “adopt a per se rule that all police offense-and-incident reports are subject to disclosure notwithstanding the applicability of any exemption”); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ohio DOC, Div. of State Fire Marshall*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 17AP-63, 2019-Ohio-4009, ¶ 27 (formatted fill-in-the-blank pages of fire incident report were subject to disclosure but narrative “Cause Determination” that contained investigator’s conclusions on cause of the fire qualified as investigatory work product).
- ⁵⁴⁶ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 44-45 (information referred from a children services agency as potentially criminal may be redacted from police files, including the incident report, pursuant to R.C. 2151.421(H)).
- ⁵⁴⁷ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Morrow Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 105 Ohio St.3d 172, 2005-Ohio-685, ¶ 7-8.
- ⁵⁴⁸ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hamilton Cty.*, 75 Ohio St.3d 374, 378 (1996) (“There is no expectation of privacy when a person makes a 911 call. Instead, there is an expectation that the information provided will be recorded and disclosed to the public.”).
- ⁵⁴⁹ R.C. 128.99 establishes criminal penalties for violation of R.C. 128.96(H).
- ⁵⁵⁰ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ohio Dept. of Public Safety*, 148 Ohio St.3d 433, 2016-Ohio-7987, ¶ 45-50.
- ⁵⁵¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(jj).
- ⁵⁵² R.C. 149.43(A)(17)(a)-(q).
- ⁵⁵³ R.C. 149.43(H)(1)(a)-(b).
- ⁵⁵⁴ R.C. 149.43(H)(2).
- ⁵⁵⁵ 2001 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 041; 1999 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 006; *State ex rel. Natl. Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Cleveland*, 82 Ohio App.3d 202, 214 (8th Dist. 1992).
- ⁵⁵⁶ 2001 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 041; 1999 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 006.
- ⁵⁵⁷ 2001 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 041.
- ⁵⁵⁸ 1990 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 101.
- ⁵⁵⁹ R.C. 2151.313; *State ex rel. Carpenter v. Chief of Police*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 62482, 1992 Ohio App. LEXIS 5055 (1992) (noting that “other records” relating to a juvenile’s arrest or custody under R.C. 2151.313 may include the juvenile’s statement or an investigator’s report if they would identify the juvenile); but see R.C. 2151.313(A)(3) (“This section does not apply to a child to whom either of the following applies: (a) The child has been arrested or otherwise taken into custody for committing, or has been adjudicated a delinquent child for committing, an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult or has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to committing a felony. (b) There is probable cause to believe that the child may have committed an act that would be a felony if committed by an adult.”). NOTE: this statute does not apply to records of a juvenile arrest or custody that were not the reason for taking fingerprints and photographs.
- ⁵⁶⁰ R.C. 2151.421(H).
- ⁵⁶¹ R.C. 2151.355-.358.
- ⁵⁶² R.C. 2151.14(D)(1)(e).
- ⁵⁶³ 18 U.S.C. § 5038(a), 5038(e) of the Federal Juvenile Delinquency Act (18 U.S.C. 5031-5042) (providing that these records can be accessed by authorized persons and law enforcement agencies).
- ⁵⁶⁴ 18 U.S.C. § 5038(d).
- ⁵⁶⁵ R.C. 149.43(A)(11) (“Community control sanction” has the same meaning as in R.C. 2929.01).
- ⁵⁶⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(12) (“Post-release control sanction” has the same meaning as in R.C. 2967.01).
- ⁵⁶⁷ *State ex rel. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers v. Gosser*, 20 Ohio St.3d 30, 32 (1985), fn. 2.
- ⁵⁶⁸ *State ex rel. Hadlock v. Polito*, 74 Ohio App.3d 764, 766 (8th Dist. 1991).
- ⁵⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Lipschutz v. Shoemaker*, 49 Ohio St.3d 88, 90 (1990).

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⁵⁷⁰ *State ex rel. Gaines v. Adult Parole Auth.*, 5 Ohio St.3d 104 (1983).

⁵⁷¹ See, e.g., [R.C. 113.041\(E\)](#) (criminal history checks of employees of the state treasurer); [R.C. 109.5721\(E\)](#) (information of arrest or conviction received by a public office from BCI that is retained in the applicant fingerprint database); [R.C. 2151.86\(E\)](#) (criminal history checks of children's day care employees); [R.C. 3319.39\(D\)](#) (criminal history check of teachers). Some statutes may also require dissemination of notice of an employee's or volunteer's conviction. See, e.g., [R.C. 109.576](#) (providing for notice of a volunteer's conviction when the volunteer has unsupervised access to a child).

⁵⁷² [R.C. 109.57\(D\)](#), (H); [O.A.C. 4501:2-10-06\(C\)](#); 34 U.S.C. 10231; 28 C.F.R. 20.33.

⁵⁷³ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 142 (1995) (records of police officer's disciplinary action are not "law enforcement matters" for purposes of CLEIRs); *State ex rel. Natl. Broadcasting Co., Inc. v. Cleveland*, 38 Ohio St.3d 79, 84 (1988) (CLEIRs exemption does not cover law enforcement investigations routinely conducted in every use of force incident, absent evidence of "specific suspicion of criminal wrongdoing").

⁵⁷⁴ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)\(a\)](#). "Medical record" means any document or combination of documents, except births, deaths, and the fact of admission to or discharge from a hospital, that pertains to the medical history, diagnosis, prognosis, or medical condition of a patient and that is generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment." [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(3\)](#).

⁵⁷⁵ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(c\)](#).

⁵⁷⁶ *State v. Hall*, 141 Ohio App.3d 561, 568 (4th Dist. 2001) (psychiatric reports compiled solely to assist the court with "competency to stand trial determination" were not medical records); *State v. Rohrer*, 4th Dist. Ross No. 14CA3471, 2015-Ohio-5333, ¶ 52-57 (psychiatric reports generated "for purposes of the continued commitment proceedings" were not medical records).

⁵⁷⁷ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 144-145 (1995) (police psychologist report obtained to assist the police hiring process is not a medical record).

⁵⁷⁸ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 143 (1995).

⁵⁷⁹ 42 U.S.C. § 12112; 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14(b)(1), (c)(1).

⁵⁸⁰ 29 C.F.R. 1630.14(c); see also *State ex rel. Mahajan v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 127 Ohio St.3d 497, 2010-Ohio-5995, ¶ 44, 47 (employer's questions of court reporter and opposing counsel properly redacted as inquiry into whether employee was able to perform job-related functions; pertinent ADA provision does not limit the confidential nature of such inquiries to questions directed to employees or medical personnel).

⁵⁸¹ 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14(b)(1), (c)(1).

⁵⁸² [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)\(v\)](#).

⁵⁸³ [R.C. 1347.15\(A\)\(1\)](#).

⁵⁸⁴ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Wells*, 18 Ohio St.3d 382, 384 (1985) (invalidating provision in collective bargaining agreement requiring city to ensure confidentiality of officers' personnel records); *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Columbus*, 90 Ohio St.3d 39, 40-43 (2000) (Fraternal Order of Police could not legally bar the production of available public records through a records disposition provision in a collective bargaining agreement).

⁵⁸⁵ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Wells*, 18 Ohio St.3d 382, 384 (1985).

⁵⁸⁶ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(1\)\(p\)](#), (A)(7)-(8).

⁵⁸⁷ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Peace officer" has the meaning defined in [R.C. 109.71](#) and includes the "superintendent and troopers of the state highway patrol; it does not include the sheriff of a county or a supervisory employee who, in the absence of the sheriff, is authorized to stand in for, exercise the authority of, and perform the duties of the sheriff.")

⁵⁸⁸ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Correctional employee" means any employee of the department of rehabilitation and correction who in the course of performing the employee's job duties has or has had contact with inmates and persons under supervision.")

⁵⁸⁹ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Firefighter" means any regular, paid or volunteer, member of a lawfully constituted fire department of a municipal corporation, township, fire district, or village.")

⁵⁹⁰ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Emergency service telecommunicator" has the meaning defined [R.C. 128.01](#)).

⁵⁹¹ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Regional psychiatric hospital employee" means any employee of the department of mental health and addiction services who, in the course of performing the employee's duties, has contact with patients committed to the department of mental health and addiction services by a court order pursuant to" [R.C. 2945.38](#), [2945.39](#), [2945.40](#), or [2945.402](#).)

⁵⁹² [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("County or multicounty corrections officer" means any corrections officer employed by any county or multicounty correctional facility.")

⁵⁹³ [R.C. 149.43 \(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Designated Ohio national guard member" means a member of the Ohio national guard who is participating in duties related to remotely piloted aircraft, including, but not limited to, pilots, sensor operators, and mission intelligence personnel, duties related to special forces operations, or duties related to cybersecurity, and is designated by the adjutant general as a designated public service worker for those purposes.")

⁵⁹⁴ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Forensic mental health provider" means any employee of a community mental health service provider or local alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services board who, in the course of the employee's duties, has contact with persons committed to local alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services board by a court order pursuant to" [R.C. 2945.38](#), [2945.39](#), [2945.40](#), or [2945.402](#).)

⁵⁹⁵ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Mental health evaluation provider" means an individual who, under Chapter 5122 of the Revised Code, examines a respondent who is alleged to be a mentally ill person subject to court order, as defined in section [5122.01](#) of the Revised Code, and reports to the probate court the respondent's mental condition.")

⁵⁹⁶ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Protective services worker" means any employee of a county agency who is responsible for child protective services, child support services, or adult protective services.")

⁵⁹⁷ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Federal law enforcement officer" has the meaning defined in [R.C. 9.88](#)).

⁵⁹⁸ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Investigator of the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation" has the meaning defined in [R.C. 2903.11](#)).

⁵⁹⁹ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("Youth services employee" means any employee of the department of youth services who in the course of performing the employee's job duties has or has had contact with children committed to the custody of the department of youth services.")

⁶⁰⁰ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(9\)](#) ("EMT" means EMTs-basic, EMTs-I, and paramedics that provide emergency medical services for a public emergency medical service organization;" "Emergency medical service organization," "EMT-basic," "EMT-I," and "paramedic" have the meanings" defined in [R.C. 4765.01](#)).

⁶⁰¹ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(a\)](#).

⁶⁰² For purposes of this exemption, a child of a peace officer includes a natural or adopted child, a stepchild, and a minor or adult child. See [2000 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 021](#).

⁶⁰³ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(f\)](#).

⁶⁰⁴ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(b\)](#).

⁶⁰⁵ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(c\)](#).

⁶⁰⁶ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(d\)](#).

⁶⁰⁷ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(e\)](#).

⁶⁰⁸ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(g\)](#).

⁶⁰⁹ [R.C. 149.43\(A\)\(8\)\(c\) and \(f\)](#).

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- ⁶¹⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(8)(f).
- ⁶¹¹ 2000 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 021.
- ⁶¹² R.C. 149.45(D)(1). The form to make this request is available at <http://www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Sunshine>.
- ⁶¹³ *Kallstrom v. City of Columbus*, 136 F.3d 1055, 1062-63 (6th Cir. 1998).
- ⁶¹⁴ *State ex rel. Keller v. Cox*, 85 Ohio St. 3d 279, 282, 1999-Ohio-264; see also *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Craig*, 132 Ohio St.3d 68, 2012-Ohio-1999 (city properly denied a public records request for the identities of two police officers based on constitutionally protected privacy concerns).
- ⁶¹⁵ Ohio Constitution, Article I, Section 10a(A)(1).
- ⁶¹⁶ Prior to 2023, the Supreme Court of Ohio found that there was no victim right to privacy in the constitution. See *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 41 (although a federal court recognized a sexual assault victim's constitutional right to privacy (*Bloch v. Ribar*, 156 F.3d 673 (6th Cir. 1998)) there is no "categorical exception" to disclosure of information about a sexual assault victim). But the provisions enacted through Marsy's Law now control.
- ⁶¹⁷ Ohio Constitution, Article I, Section 10a(D); R.C. 2930.01(H).
- ⁶¹⁸ R.C. 2930.02(A)(1)(a).
- ⁶¹⁹ R.C. 2930.02(A)(1)(b).
- ⁶²⁰ R.C. 2930.02(A)(2).
- ⁶²¹ R.C. 2930.04(C)(1).
- ⁶²² R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(a)-(b).
- ⁶²³ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(c).
- ⁶²⁴ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(p).
- ⁶²⁵ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(q).
- ⁶²⁶ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(k).
- ⁶²⁷ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(q)(ii).
- ⁶²⁸ R.C. 2930.04(B)(1)(v).
- ⁶²⁹ R.C. 2930.07(D)(1)(a)(i).
- ⁶³⁰ R.C. 2930.07(D)(1)(a)(ii); R.C. 2930.04(E)(2)(a).
- ⁶³¹ R.C. 2930.07(D)(1)(b).
- ⁶³² R.C. 2930.07(C), (D)(1)(a)(ii); R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v).
- ⁶³³ R.C. 2930.07(F)(2).
- ⁶³⁴ R.C. 2930.07(A)(1)(a).
- ⁶³⁵ R.C. 2930.07(A)(1)(a).
- ⁶³⁶ R.C. 2930.07(A)(1)(b).
- ⁶³⁷ R.C. 2930.07(C).
- ⁶³⁸ R.C. 2930.07(C).
- ⁶³⁹ R.C. 2930.07(F)(3).
- ⁶⁴⁰ R.C. 2930.07(F)(5).
- ⁶⁴¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(8); *State ex rel. Papa v. Starkey*, 5th Dist. Stark No.2014CA00001, 2014-Ohio-2989, ¶ 7-9 (the statutory process applies to an incarcerated criminal offender who seeks records relating to any criminal prosecution, not just of the inmate's own criminal case).
- ⁶⁴² *State ex rel. Bristow v. Chief of Police, Cedar Point Police Dept.*, 6th Dist. Erie No. E-15-066, 2016-Ohio-3084, ¶ 10.
- ⁶⁴³ *State ex rel. Russell v. Thornton*, 111 Ohio St.3d 409, 2006-Ohio-5858, ¶ 14.
- ⁶⁴⁴ *State ex rel. Barb v. Cuyahoga Cty. Jury Commr.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 528, 2011-Ohio-1914, ¶ 1.
- ⁶⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 35.
- ⁶⁴⁶ *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 34-36.
- ⁶⁴⁷ R.C. 149.43(B)(8); *McCain v. Huffman*, 151 Ohio St.3d 611, 2017-Ohio-9241, ¶ 12 (denying an inmate request when the requested records would be "of no legal consequence"); *State v. Dowell*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 102408, 2015-Ohio-3237, ¶ 8 (denying inmate request for records when inmate "did not identify any pending proceeding for which the requested records would be material"); *State v. Wilson*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 23734, 2011-Ohio-4195 (holding application for clemency is not a "justiciable claim").
- ⁶⁴⁸ *State v. Lather*, 6th Dist. Sandusky No. S-08-036, 2009-Ohio-3215, ¶ 13; *State v. Chatfield*, 5th Dist. Perry No. 10CA12, 2010-Ohio-4261, ¶ 14 (holding that inmate may file R.C. 149.43(B)(8) motion pro se, even if currently represented by criminal counsel in the original action).
- ⁶⁴⁹ *State ex rel. Russell v. Thornton*, 111 Ohio St.3d 409, 2006-Ohio-5858, ¶ 16-17.
- ⁶⁵⁰ *State v. Heid*, 4th Dist. Scioto No. 14CA3655, 2014-Ohio-4714, ¶ 3-5 (denial of inmate's request for order under R.C.149.43(B)(8) is a final appealable order); *State v. Thornton*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No 23291, 2009-Ohio-5049, ¶ 8; *State v. Armengau*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 16AP-418, 2016-Ohio-5534, ¶ 12.
- ⁶⁵¹ *State ex rel. Bloodworth v. Bogan*, 12th Dist. Warren No. CA 2016-05-043, 2017-Ohio-7810, ¶ 26.
- ⁶⁵² *State ex rel. Russell v. Thornton*, 111 Ohio St.3d 409, 2006-Ohio-5858, ¶ 4-18.
- ⁶⁵³ *State ex rel. Ware v. Parikh*, Slip Op. No. 2022-0191, 2023-Ohio-759, ¶ 9-13 (inmate was entitled to records relating to a mandamus action and awarding statutory damages); *State ex rel. Gregory v. City of Toledo*, 170 Ohio St.3d 395, 2023-Ohio-651, ¶ 10-16 (holding that, even when part of a request is barred by R.C. 149.43(B)(8), public offices may not ignore portions of inmate requests that do not relate to a criminal proceeding).

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V. Chapter Five: Other Categories of Records

A. Employment Records

Public employee personnel records are generally considered public records.⁶⁵⁴ However, if any item contained within a personnel file or other employment record⁶⁵⁵ is not a “record” of the office, or is subject to an exemption, it may be withheld. We recommend that Human Resource officers prepare a list of information and records in the office’s personnel files that are subject to withholding, including the explanation and legal authority for each item. The office can use this list for prompt and consistent responses to public records requests. A sample list is on page 74 below.

Note: the categories addressed in this section may not include all exemptions (or types of employment records) that could apply to every public office’s personnel records.

1. Non-records

To the extent that any item or information contained in a personnel file is not a “record,” that is, when it does not document the organization, operations, etc., of the public office, it is not a public record and need not be disclosed.⁶⁵⁶ Based on this reasoning, the Supreme Court of Ohio has held that in most instances the home addresses of public employees kept by their employers solely for administrative convenience are not “records” of the office.⁶⁵⁷ Home and personal cell phone numbers, emergency contact information, employee banking information, insurance beneficiary designations, personal email addresses, and similar items may be maintained only for administrative convenience and do not document the formal duties and activities of the office; a public office should evaluate these types of records carefully. Non-record items or information may be redacted from materials that are otherwise records, such as a civil service application form.

2. Names of public officials and employees

Under R.C. 149.434(A), “[e]ach public office or person responsible for public records shall maintain a database or a list that includes the name of all public officials and employees elected to or employed by that public office. The database or list is a public record and shall be made available upon a request made pursuant to section 149.43 of the Revised Code.”⁶⁵⁸ Like other employee names, juvenile employee names are required to be disclosed under R.C. 149.434(A) and do not fall under any exemption.⁶⁵⁹

3. Resumes and application materials

There is no public records exemption that generally protects resumes and application materials obtained by public offices in the hiring process. The Supreme Court of Ohio has held that “[t]he public has an unquestioned public interest in the qualifications of potential applicants for positions of authority in public employment.”⁶⁶⁰ For example, when a city board of education used a private search firm to help hire a new treasurer, it was required to disclose the names and resumes of the interviewees.⁶⁶¹ The fact that a public office has promised confidentiality to applicants is irrelevant.⁶⁶²

A public office’s obligation to produce application materials and resumes extends to records in the sole possession of private search firms used in the hiring process.⁶⁶³ However, application materials may not be public records if they are not “kept by”⁶⁶⁴ the office at the time of the request. For example, when a school board returned application materials to the candidates for a superintendent position, the court held that the materials had never been “kept” by the board.⁶⁶⁵

As with any other category of records, if an exemption for home address, social security number, or other specific item applies, it may be used to redact only the protected information.

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4. Background investigations

There is no public records exemption that applies to background investigations,⁶⁶⁶ although specific statutes may exempt defined background investigation materials kept by specific public offices.⁶⁶⁷ Criminal history “rap sheets” obtained from the federal National Crime Information Center system (NCIC) or through the state Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) are subject to several statutory exemptions.⁶⁶⁸

5. Evaluations and disciplinary records

There is no public records exemption that applies to employee evaluations or records of disciplinary actions. The CLEIRs exemption does not apply to routine law enforcement discipline or personnel matters,⁶⁶⁹ even when such matters are the subject of an internal investigation within a law enforcement agency.⁶⁷⁰

6. Employee assistance program (EAP) records

Records of the identity, diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment of any person that are maintained in connection with an EAP are not public records.⁶⁷¹ Use and release of these records is strictly limited.

7. Physical fitness, psychiatric, and polygraph examinations

The exemption in the Public Records Act for “medical records” is limited to records generated and maintained in the process of medical *treatment*; these types of records generally are not covered by this exemption. Accordingly, records of examinations performed for the purpose of determining fitness for hiring or for continued employment, including psychiatric⁶⁷² and psychological⁶⁷³ examinations, are not exempted from disclosure as “medical records.” Similarly, polygraph or “lie detector” examinations are not “medical records,” and do not fall under the CLEIRs exemption when performed in connection with hiring.⁶⁷⁴

However, federal law may exempt some examinations from disclosure. The federal Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and its implementing regulations⁶⁷⁵ permit employers to require employees and applicants to whom they have offered employment to undergo medical examination and/or inquiry into their ability to perform job-related functions.⁶⁷⁶ Information regarding medical condition or history must be collected and kept on separate forms and in separate medical files and must be treated as confidential, except as otherwise provided by the ADA.⁶⁷⁷ These records may be exempted from disclosure under the so-called “catch-all” provision of the Public Records Act as “records the release of which is prohibited by state or federal law.”⁶⁷⁸ As non-public records, the examinations may constitute “confidential personal information” under Ohio’s Personal Information Systems Act.⁶⁷⁹

8. Medical records

“Medical records” are not public records,⁶⁸⁰ and a public office may withhold any medical records in a personnel file. “Medical records” are those generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment.⁶⁸¹ Note that the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA),⁶⁸² does not apply to records in employer personnel files, but that the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)⁶⁸³ or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)⁶⁸⁴ may apply to medical-related information in personnel files.

9. School records

Ohio law and the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) generally prohibits schools from releasing education records that are maintained by the school and that are directly related to a student.⁶⁸⁵ Examples of such records include transcripts, attendance records, and discipline records as well as personally identifiable information from education records. However, when a student or

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former student provides such records directly to a public office, those records are not protected by FERPA and are considered public records.

10. Social security numbers and taxpayer records

Social security numbers should be redacted from public records before disclosure.⁶⁸⁶ Ohio statutes or administrative codes may provide other exemptions for social security numbers and other information for specific employees,⁶⁸⁷ when posted in specific locations,⁶⁸⁸ and/or upon request.⁶⁸⁹

Information obtained from municipal tax returns is confidential.⁶⁹⁰ One Attorney General Opinion concluded that copies of W-2 federal tax forms prepared and maintained by a township as an employer are public records.⁶⁹¹ However, W-2 forms filed as part of a municipal income tax return are confidential.⁶⁹² Federal law makes “returns” and “return information” confidential.⁶⁹³ The term “return information” is interpreted broadly to include any information gathered by the IRS with respect to a taxpayer’s liability under the Internal Revenue Code.⁶⁹⁴

With respect to Ohio income tax records, any information gained as the result of returns, investigations, hearings, or verifications required or authorized by R.C. Chapter 5747 is confidential.⁶⁹⁵

11. Residential and familial information of designated public service workers

The residential and familial information⁶⁹⁶ of certain designated public service workers may be withheld from disclosure.⁶⁹⁷ Refer to Chapter Four: D.5 “Residential and familial information of covered professions,” for additional discussion of this exemption.

12. Bargaining agreement provisions

Courts have held that collective bargaining agreements concerning the confidentiality of records cannot prevail over the Public Records Act. For example, a union may not legally bar the production of available public records through a provision in a collective bargaining agreement.⁶⁹⁸

13. Statutes specific to a particular agency’s employees

Statutes may protect specific information or records concerning specific public offices, or specific employees⁶⁹⁹ within one or more agencies.⁷⁰⁰

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Personnel Files

The following lists are not exhaustive and are intended as a starting point for each public office in compiling lists appropriate to its employee records.

Items from Personnel Files that Are Subject to Release with Appropriate Redaction

- Payroll records
 - Timesheets
 - Employment application forms
 - Resumes
 - Training course certificates
 - Position descriptions
 - Performance evaluations
 - Leave conversion forms
 - Letters of support or complaint
 - Forms documenting receipt of office policies, directives, etc.
 - Forms documenting hiring, promotions, job classification changes, separation, etc.
 - Background checks, other than information or throughput from Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS), the National Crime Information Center system (NCIC), and Computerized Criminal History (CCH)
 - Disciplinary investigation/action records, unless exempt from disclosure by law
 - Limited access files
-

Items from Personnel Files that May or Must Be Withheld

- Social security numbers (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd), 149.45(A)(1)(a))
- Public employee home addresses, phone numbers, and personal email addresses, generally (as non-record)
- Residential and familial information of a peace officer, parole officer, probation officer, bailiff, prosecuting attorney, assistant prosecuting attorney, correctional employee, county or multicounty corrections officer, community-based correctional facility employee, designated Ohio national guard member, protective services worker, youth services employee, firefighter, EMT, medical director or member of a cooperating physician advisory board of an emergency medical service organization, state board of pharmacy employee, investigator of the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, emergency service telecommunicator, forensic mental health provider, mental health evaluation provider, regional psychiatric hospital employee, judge, magistrate, or federal law enforcement officer, other than actual personal residence address of a prosecuting attorney or judge (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(p) and (A)(7)-(8))

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- Employee ID numbers (if the number is part of the public office's security) (R.C. 149.433)
 - Charitable deductions and employment benefit deductions such as health insurance (as non-records)
 - Beneficiary information (as non-record)
 - Federal tax returns and "return information" filed under the jurisdiction of the IRS (26 U.S.C. § 6103)
 - Personal history information of state retirement contributors (R.C. 145.27(A); R.C. 742.41(B); R.C. 3307.20(B); R.C. 3309.22(A); R.C. 5505.04(C))
 - Taxpayer records maintained by Ohio Department of Taxation and by municipal corporations (R.C. 5747.18; R.C. 718.13)
 - "Medical records" that are generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a) and (A)(3))
 - LEADS, NCIC, or CCH criminal record information (34 U.S.C. § 10231; 28 C.F.R. § 20.21, § 20.33(a)(3); R.C. 109.57(D)-(E), (H); O.A.C. 4501:2-10-06)
 - Information regarding an employee's medical condition or history compiled as a result of a medical examination required by employer to ensure employee's ability to perform job related functions (29 C.F.R. 1630.14(c)(1))
 - Information gathered by employer who conducts voluntary medical examination of employee as part of an employee health program (29 C.F.R. 1630.14(d)(4))
 - Verification of employment, typically for mortgage loans (as non-record)
 - Bank account numbers (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd); R.C. 149.45)
 - Employee assistance program records (R.C. 124.88(B))
-

B. Court Records

Although records kept by the courts of Ohio otherwise meet the definition of public records under the Public Records Act,⁷⁰¹ access to most court records is governed by a separate set of rules, the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio. Rules 44 through 47 of the Rules of Superintendence govern public access to "court records."⁷⁰² Rules 44 through 47 expressly apply to all Ohio courts of appeal, courts of common pleas, municipal courts, county courts, and the Supreme Court of Ohio.⁷⁰³ The public access rules of the Rules of Superintendence (Rules 44 through 47) do not apply to "court records" of the Ohio Court of Claims.

1. Courts' supervisory power over their own records

Ohio courts⁷⁰⁴ are subject to the Rules of Superintendence, adopted by the Supreme Court of Ohio. Therefore, a requester wishing to obtain records from the judicial branch must generally submit the request under the Rules of Superintendence.⁷⁰⁵ The Rules of Superintendence establish rights and duties regarding court case documents and administrative documents, starting with the statement that "[c]ourt records are presumed open to public access."⁷⁰⁶ While similar to the Public Records Act, the Rules of Superintendence contain some additional or different provisions, including language:

- For internet records, allowing courts to announce that an attachment or exhibit was not scanned but is available by direct access.⁷⁰⁷
- Establishing definitions of "court record," "case document," "administrative document," "case file," and other terms.⁷⁰⁸

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- Identifying a process for restricting public access to part or all of any case document, including a process for any person to request access to a case document or information that has been granted limited public access.⁷⁰⁹
- Requiring that documents filed with the court omit or redact personal identifiers. The personal identifiers would instead be submitted on a separate standard form submitted only to the court, clerk of courts, and parties.⁷¹⁰

(This is a partial list – see Rules 44 through 47 of the Rules of Superintendence for all provisions.)

In addition, unlike the Public Records Act, the “Rules of Superintendence do not authorize statutory damages under any circumstances.”⁷¹¹

2. Application of Rules of Superintendence and Public Records Act to Court Records

Rules 44 through 47 of the Rules of Superintendence apply to “court records,” which are categorized as “case document[s] and ... administrative document[s] regardless of physical form or characteristic, manner of creation, or method of storage.”⁷¹² “‘Case document’ means a document and information in a document submitted to a court or filed with a clerk of court in a judicial action or proceeding, including exhibits, pleadings, motions, orders, and judgments, and any documentation prepared by the court or clerk in the judicial action or proceeding, such as journals, dockets, and indices.”⁷¹³ “‘Administrative document’ means a document . . . created . . . or maintained by a court that serves to record the administrative, fiscal, personnel, or management functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, organization, or other activities of the court[.]”⁷¹⁴

Note that the Rules of Superintendence only apply to “case documents” in actions commenced on or after July 1, 2009.⁷¹⁵ The Public Records Act will apply to “case documents” in actions commenced before July 1, 2009.⁷¹⁶ However, Rules 44 through 47 of the Rules of Superintendence apply to all “administrative documents,” regardless of when the action commenced.⁷¹⁷ Sup.R. 44(C)(2)(h), which restricts public access to certain domestic relations and juvenile court case documents, applies only to case documents in actions commenced on or after January 1, 2016.⁷¹⁸

3. Rules of court procedure

Rules of court procedure, such as the Ohio Rules of Civil Procedure and the Ohio Rules of Criminal Procedure, which are also adopted through the Supreme Court of Ohio, can create exemptions to public records disclosure.⁷¹⁹ Examples include certain records related to grand jury proceedings⁷²⁰ and certain juvenile court records.⁷²¹

4. Sealing statutes

Court records that have been properly expunged or sealed are not available for public disclosure.⁷²² However, unless the statute providing the authority for sealing the record states otherwise, the public office must provide the explanation for withholding, including the legal authority under which the record was sealed.⁷²³ Even absent statutory authority, the Supreme Court of Ohio has found that trial courts have the inherent authority to seal court records in unusual and exceptional circumstances.⁷²⁴ That inherent authority, however, is limited.⁷²⁵

For example, the Supreme Court of Ohio held that there is no such authority “when the offender has been convicted and is not a first-time offender.”⁷²⁶ In such cases, the only authority to seal is statutory.⁷²⁷ Courts have no authority to seal an offense that has been pardoned by the governor when the offender is not otherwise statutorily eligible for sealing.⁷²⁸ The Supreme Court also held that courts do not have inherent authority to unseal records and may only unseal records when

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statutorily authorized. Finally, as of April 2023, people convicted of certain crimes may seek to have records related to their conviction expunged, when they were previously only able to have the records sealed.⁷²⁹

5. Restricting public access to a case document

Sup.R. 45(E) provides a procedure for courts to restrict public access to all or part of a case document. Any party to a judicial action may, by written motion, request that the court restrict public access to all or part of a case document.⁷³⁰ The court may also restrict public access upon its own order.⁷³¹

Under this Rule, a court shall restrict public access “if it finds by clear and convincing evidence that the presumption of allowing public access is outweighed by a higher interest after considering” certain factors.⁷³² The court should consider whether public policy is served by restricting access, whether there is a law that exempts the record from public access, and whether there is a risk of injury or other harm if the record is public.⁷³³

Further, when a court restricts public access, it must use “the least restrictive means available.”⁷³⁴ The Supreme Court of Ohio has ordered courts to unseal records after finding that there was not clear and convincing evidence to warrant restricting access,⁷³⁵ or if the court failed to use the least restrictive means to do so.⁷³⁶

6. General court records retention

Specific Rules of Superintendence provide the rules and procedures for courts’ retention of records. Sup.R. 26 governs Court Records Management and Retention, and Sup.R. 26.01 through 26.05 set records retention schedules for each type of court.

C. HIPAA and HITECH

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (“HIPAA”) governs the privacy of individual health records. Among the regulations written to implement HIPAA was the “Privacy Rule,” which is a collection of federal regulations seeking to maintain the confidentiality of individually identifiable health information.⁷³⁷

The Health Information Technology Economic Clinical Health Act (“HITECH”) addresses the privacy and security concerns associated with the electronic transmission of health information and materially affects the privacy and security of protected health information.⁷³⁸ For some public offices, the Privacy Rule and HITECH affect the way they respond to public records requests. Amendments to HIPAA and HITECH are reflected in the *Federal Register* publication, “Modifications to the HIPAA Privacy, Security, Enforcement, and Breach Notification Rules,” 78 Fed. Reg. 5565 (Jan. 25, 2013) (codified at 45 C.F.R. §§ 160 and 164).

1. HIPAA definitions

The Privacy Rule protects all individually identifiable health information, which is called “protected health information” or “PHI.”⁷³⁹ PHI is information that could reasonably lead to the identification of an individual, either by itself or in combination with other reasonably available information.⁷⁴⁰ The HIPAA regulations apply to the three “covered entities”⁷⁴¹ listed below:

- **Healthcare provider:** any entity providing mental or health services that electronically transmits health information for any financial or administrative purpose subject to HIPAA.
- **A health plan:** an individual or group plan that provides or pays the cost of medical care, such as an HMO.

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- **Health care clearinghouse:** any entity that processes health information from one format into another for particular purposes, such as a billing service.

Consult legal counsel if there is uncertainty about whether a particular public office is a “covered entity” or “business associate” of a covered entity, for purposes of HIPAA.

2. *HIPAA does not apply when Ohio Public Records Act requires release*

The Privacy Rule permits a covered entity to use and disclose protected health information as required by other law, including state law.⁷⁴² For this purpose, note that the Public Records Act only mandates disclosure when no other exemption applies.

This means that when the public records law only permits, but does not mandate, the disclosure of protected health information, such disclosures are not “required by law” and would not fall within the Privacy Rule. For example, if state public records law includes an exemption that gives a state agency discretion not to disclose medical⁷⁴³ or other information, the disclosure of such records is not required by the public records law; and therefore, the Privacy Rule would cover those records.⁷⁴⁴ In such cases, a covered entity only would be able to make the disclosure if permitted by another provision of the Privacy Rule. The Supreme Court of Ohio has held that HIPAA did not supersede state disclosure requirements, even if requested records contained protected health information.⁷⁴⁵ Specifically, the Supreme Court held that “[a] review of HIPAA reveals a ‘required by law’ exception to the prohibition against disclosure of protected health information. With respect to this position, Section 164.512(a)(1), Title 45, C.F.R., provides, ‘A covered entity may ... disclose protected health information to the extent that such ... disclosure is *required* by law[.]’”⁷⁴⁶ However, the “Public Records Act requires disclosure of records unless the disclosure or release is prohibited by federal law.”⁷⁴⁷ While the court found the interaction of the federal and state law somewhat “circular,” the Court resolved it in favor of disclosure under the Public Records Act.⁷⁴⁸

D. *Ohio Personal Information Systems Act*

Ohio’s Personal Information Systems Act (PISA) generally regulates the maintenance and use of personal information systems (collections of information that describe individuals) by state and local agencies.⁷⁴⁹ PISA applies to those items to which the Public Records Act does not apply—that is, records that have been determined to be non-public, and items and information that are not “records” as defined by the Public Records Act.⁷⁵⁰

Note: Because PISA concerns the treatment of non-records and non-public records, it is not set out in detail in this Sunshine Laws Manual. Public offices should consult with their legal counsel for further guidance about this law.

The General Assembly has made clear that PISA is not designed to deprive the public of otherwise public information by incorporating the following provisions with respect to the Public Records and Open Meetings Acts:

- State and local agencies whose principal activities are to enforce the criminal laws are exempt from PISA.⁷⁵¹
- “The provisions of this chapter shall not be construed to prohibit the release of public records, or the disclosure of personal information in public records, as defined in [the Public Records Act], or to authorize a public body to hold an executive session for the discussion of personal information if the executive session is not authorized under division (G) of [the Open Meetings Act].”⁷⁵²

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- “The disclosure to members of the general public of personal information contained in a public record, as defined in [the Public Records Act], is not an improper use of personal information under this chapter.”⁷⁵³
- As used in the PISA, “‘confidential personal information’ means personal information that is *not* a public record for purposes of [the Public Records Act].”⁷⁵⁴

1. *Definitions that apply to the information covered by PISA*

“Personal information” under PISA means any information that:

- Describes anything about a person; or
- Indicates actions done by or to a person; or
- Indicates that a person possesses certain personal characteristics; and
- Contains, and can be retrieved from a system by, a name, identifying number, symbol, or other identifier assigned to a person.⁷⁵⁵

“‘Confidential personal information’ means personal information that is *not* a public record for purposes of [the Public Records Act].”⁷⁵⁶

A personal information “system” is:

- Any collection or group of related records that are kept in an organized manner and maintained by a state or local agency; and
- From which personal information is retrieved by the name of the person or by some identifying number, symbol, or other identifier assigned to the person; including
- Records that are stored manually and electronically.⁷⁵⁷

The following are not “systems” for purposes of PISA:

- Collected archival records in the custody of or administered under the authority of the Ohio History Connection;
- Published directories, reference materials, or newsletters; or
- Routine information that is maintained for the purpose of internal office administration, the use of which would not adversely affect a person.⁷⁵⁸

PISA generally requires accurate maintenance and prompt deletion of inaccurate personal information from “personal information systems” maintained by public offices, and protects personal information from unauthorized dissemination.⁷⁵⁹ Based on provisions added to the law in 2009, state agencies⁷⁶⁰ must adopt rules under Chapter 119 of the Revised Code regulating access to confidential personal information the agency keeps, whether electronically or on paper.⁷⁶¹ No person shall knowingly access “confidential personal information” in violation of these rules,⁷⁶² and no person shall knowingly use or disclose “confidential personal information” in a manner prohibited by law.⁷⁶³ A state agency may not employ persons who have violated access, use, or disclosure laws regarding confidential personal information.⁷⁶⁴ In general, state and local agencies must “[t]ake reasonable precautions to protect personal information in the system from unauthorized modification, destruction, use, or disclosure.”⁷⁶⁵

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2. Sanctions for violations of PISA

The enforcement provisions of PISA can include injunctive relief, civil damages, and/or criminal penalties, depending on the nature of the violation(s).⁷⁶⁶

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Notes:

⁶⁵⁴ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 143 (1995); *State ex rel. Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Assn. v. Mentor*, 89 Ohio St.3d 440, 444 (2000) (addressing police personnel records); 2007 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 026.

⁶⁵⁵ The term "personnel file" has no single definition in public records law. See *State ex rel. Morgan v. New Lexington*, 112 Ohio St.3d 33, 2006-Ohio-6365, ¶ 57 (inferring that "records that are the functional equivalent of personnel files exist and are in the custody of the city" when a respondent claimed that no personnel files designated by the respondent existed); *Cwynar v. Jackson Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 178 Ohio App.3d 345, 2008-Ohio-5011, ¶ 31 (5th Dist.) (finding that, when the appellant requested only the complete personnel file and not all the records relating to an individual's employment, "[i]t is the responsibility of the person making the public records request to identify the records with reasonable clarity").

⁶⁵⁶ *State ex rel. McCleary v. Roberts*, 88 Ohio St.3d 365, 367, 2000-Ohio-345 (2000); *State ex rel. Fant v. Enright*, 66 Ohio St.3d 186, 188 (1993) ("To the extent that any item contained in a personnel file is not a 'record,' i.e., does not serve to document the organization, etc., of the public office, it is not a public record and need not be disclosed.").

⁶⁵⁷ But see *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Johnson*, 106 Ohio St.3d 160, 2005-Ohio-4384, ¶ 39 (an employee's home address may constitute a "record" when it documents an office policy or practice, as when the employee's work address is also the employee's home address); *State ex rel. Davis v. Metzger*, 139 Ohio St.3d 423, 2014-Ohio-2329, ¶ 10 ("[P]ersonnel files require careful review to redact sensitive personal information about employees that does not document that organization or function of the agency.").

⁶⁵⁸ R.C. 149.434(A).

⁶⁵⁹ *Sengstock v. City of Twinsburg*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-00330PQ, 2021-Ohio-4438, ¶ 13, adopted by Ct. of Cl. No. 2021-0330PQ, 2022-Ohio-314 (juvenile employee names in a payroll record do not fall under any exemption and must be disclosed under R.C. 149.434).

⁶⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Consumer News Servs. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 53.

⁶⁶¹ *State ex rel. Consumer News Servs. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 40-47.

⁶⁶² *State ex rel. Consumer News Servs. v. Worthington City Bd. of Edn.*, 97 Ohio St.3d 58, 2002-Ohio-5311, ¶ 46.

⁶⁶³ *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Info. Network v. Shirey*, 78 Ohio St.3d 400, 403 (1997).

⁶⁶⁴ See Chapter One: B. "When is a Record 'Kept By' a Public Office?"

⁶⁶⁵ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer, Div. of Gannett Satellite Info. Network, Inc. v. Cincinnati Bd. of Edn.*, 99 Ohio St.3d 6, 2003-Ohio-2260, ¶ 11-15.

⁶⁶⁶ *State ex rel. Ohio Patrolmen's Benevolent Assn. v. Mentor*, 89 Ohio St.3d 440, 445 (2000), citing *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 142-45 (1995) (addressing all personnel, background, and investigation reports for police recruit class).

⁶⁶⁷ See, e.g., R.C. 113.041(E) (providing for criminal history checks of employees of the state treasurer); R.C. 109.5721(E) (regarding information of arrest or conviction received by a public office from BCI that is retained in the applicant fingerprint database); R.C. 2151.86(E) (addressing the results of criminal history checks of children's day care employees); R.C. 3319.39(D) (addressing the results of criminal history check of teachers). Statutes may also require dissemination of notice of an employee's or volunteer's conviction. See, e.g., R.C. 109.576 (providing for notice of a volunteer's conviction when the volunteer has unsupervised access to a child).

⁶⁶⁸ R.C. 109.57(D), (H); O.A.C. 4501:2-10-06(C); 34 U.S.C. 10231; 28 C.F.R. 20.33.

⁶⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Freedom Communications, Inc. v. Elida Community Fire Co.*, 82 Ohio St.3d 578, 581-82 (1998) (an investigation of an alleged sexual assault conducted internally as a personnel matter is not a law enforcement matter).

⁶⁷⁰ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 142 (1995) (records of police officer's disciplinary action not exempt as confidential law enforcement investigatory records).

⁶⁷¹ R.C. 124.88(B).

⁶⁷² *State v. Hall*, 141 Ohio App.3d 561, 568 (4th Dist. 2001) (psychiatric reports compiled solely to assist the court with "competency to stand trial determination" were not medical records); *State v. Rohrer*, 4th Dist. Ross No. 14CA3471, 2015-Ohio-5333, ¶ 52-57 (psychiatric reports generated "for purposes of the continued commitment proceedings" were not medical records).

⁶⁷³ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 143 (1995) (police psychologist report obtained to assist the police hiring process is not a medical record).

⁶⁷⁴ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Snowden*, 72 Ohio St.3d 141, 143 (1995).

⁶⁷⁵ 542 U.S.C. § 12112; 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14(b)(1), (c)(1).

⁶⁷⁶ 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14(c); see also *State ex rel. Mahajan v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 127 Ohio St.3d 497, 2010-Ohio-5995, ¶ 44-47 (employer's questioning of court reporter and opposing counsel was properly redacted as inquiry into whether employee was able to perform job-related functions; pertinent ADA provision does not limit the confidential nature of such inquiries to questions directed to employees or medical personnel).

⁶⁷⁷ 29 C.F.R. § 1630.14(b)(1), (c)(1).

⁶⁷⁸ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(v).

⁶⁷⁹ R.C. 1347.15(A)(1).

⁶⁸⁰ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a), (A)(3).

⁶⁸¹ R.C. 149.43(A)(3) ("medical record" means "any document...that pertains to the medical history, diagnosis, prognosis, or medical condition of a patient and that is generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment"); see also *State ex rel. Strothers v. Wertheim*, 80 Ohio St.3d 155, 158 (1997) (emphasizing that both parts of this conjunctive definition must be met in order to fall under the medical records exemption: "a record must pertain to a medical diagnosis and be generated and maintained in the process of medical treatment").

⁶⁸² 45 C.F.R. § 160.101, et seq.; 45 C.F.R. §§ 164.102, et seq.

⁶⁸³ 29 U.S.C. § 2601, et seq.; 29 C.F.R. § 825.500(g).

⁶⁸⁴ 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.

⁶⁸⁵ R.C. 3319.321; 20 U.S.C. § 1232g. See also Chapter Three: F.3. "Student Records."

⁶⁸⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(dd), 149.45(A)(1)(a). See also Chapter Three: F.1.c. "Social security numbers."

⁶⁸⁷ See, e.g., R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(p), (A)(8) (protecting residential and familial information of certain covered professionals). See also R.C. 149.45(D)(1).

⁶⁸⁸ R.C. 149.45(B)(1) ("[n]o public office or person responsible for a public office's public records shall make available to the general public on the internet any document that contains an individual's social security number without otherwise redacting, encrypting, or truncating the social security number").

⁶⁸⁹ R.C. 149.45(C)(1) ("[a]n individual may request that a public office or a person responsible for a public office's public records redact personal information of that individual from any record made available to the general public on the internet").

⁶⁹⁰ R.C. 718.13; see also Chapter Three: F.1.e. "Income tax returns."

⁶⁹¹ 1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 005.

⁶⁹² 1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 005.

⁶⁹³ 26 U.S.C. § 6103.

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⁶⁹⁴ *Patel v. United States*, N.D. Ohio No. 1:20-CV-01781, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 66308, *7 (Apr. 6, 2021).

⁶⁹⁵ R.C. 5747.18.

⁶⁹⁶ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(p), (A)(8).

⁶⁹⁷ R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(p), (A)(7).

⁶⁹⁸ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Columbus*, 90 Ohio St.3d 39, 40-43 (2000) (FOP could not legally bar the production of available public records through a records disposition provision in a collective bargaining agreement); *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Wells*, 18 Ohio St.3d 382, 384 (1985) (invalidating provision in collective bargaining agreement requiring city to ensure confidentiality to officers' personnel records).

⁶⁹⁹ See, e.g., R.C. 149.43(A)(7) (designated public service worker residential and familial information).

⁷⁰⁰ See, e.g., R.C. 2151.142 (providing for confidentiality of residential address of public children services agency or private child placing agency personnel).

⁷⁰¹ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Winkler*, 101 Ohio St.3d 382, 2004-Ohio-1581, ¶ 5 (“[I]t is apparent that court records fall within the broad definition of a ‘public record’”).

⁷⁰² See generally Sup.R. 44-47.

⁷⁰³ Sup.R. 1(A); Sup.R. 44.

⁷⁰⁴ Sup.R. 2(C) (a “court” is a county court, municipal court, court of common pleas, or court of appeals). The Supreme Court of Ohio has held that “[g]enerally, if the records requested are held by or were created for the judicial branch, then the party seeking to obtain the records must submit a request pursuant to [the Rules of Superintendence].” *State ex rel. Parisi v. Dayton Bar Assn. Certified Griev. Comm.*, 159 Ohio St.3d 211, 2019-Ohio-5157, ¶ 21. Another court has concluded that “[a]ll public records requests made to a court or an arm thereof, such as a probation department, must be made pursuant to the Rules of Superintendence.” *State ex rel. Yambrisak v. Richland Cty. Adult Court*, 5th Dist. Richland No. 15CA66, 2016-Ohio-4622, ¶ 9. But see *Fairley v. Cuyahoga Cty. Prosecutor*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00955PQ, 2020-Ohio-1425, ¶ 17 (Sup.R. 44 through 47 do not “purport to control access to copies of court records as kept by parties to litigation, including non-court public offices,” such as a prosecutor’s office).

⁷⁰⁵ *State ex rel. Parisi v. Dayton Bar Assn. Certified Griev. Comm.*, 159 Ohio St.3d 211, 2019-Ohio-5157, ¶ 20 (“[T]he Rules of Superintendence are the sole vehicle by which a party may seek to obtain such [court] records”); *State ex rel. Bey v. Byrd*, 160 Ohio St.3d 141, 2020-Ohio-2766, ¶ 14 (while the Rules of Superintendence apply to case documents created on or after July 1, 2009, “[g]enerally it is not necessary to cite a particular rule or statute in support of a records request until the requester attempts to satisfy the more demanding standard applicable when claiming that he is entitled to a writ of mandamus to compel compliance with the request”).

⁷⁰⁶ Sup.R. 45(A); see also *State ex rel. Vindicator Printing Co. v. Wolff*, 132 Ohio St.3d 481, 2012-Ohio-3328, ¶ 27 (Rules of Superintendence do not require that a document be used by court in a decision to be entitled to presumption of public access specified in Sup.R. 45(A), but that the “document or information contained in a document must merely be submitted to a court or filed with a clerk of court in a judicial action or proceeding and not be subject to the specified exclusions”).

⁷⁰⁷ Sup.R. 44(C)(1).

⁷⁰⁸ Sup.R. 44(B)-(M).

⁷⁰⁹ Sup.R. 44(E), (F).

⁷¹⁰ Sup.R. 44(D).

⁷¹¹ *State ex rel. Harris v. Pureval*, 155 Ohio St.3d 343, 2018-Ohio-4718, ¶ 11.

⁷¹² Sup.R. 44(B).

⁷¹³ Sup.R. 44(C)(1).

⁷¹⁴ Sup.R. 44(G)(1). Sup.R. 44(G)(1) applies to administrative documents “of [a] court,” not to other offices, even if those offices otherwise possess some court records. See *State ex rel. Ware v. Kurt*, 169 Ohio St.3d 223, 2022-Ohio-1627, ¶ 15 (where requester sought the policies, schedules, manuals, and employee information from the clerk of courts, the Public Records Act, not the Rules of Superintendence, applied).

⁷¹⁵ Sup.R. 47(A)(1), (2); Sup.R. 99(KK); *State ex rel. Village of Richfield v. Laria*, 138 Ohio St.3d 168, 2014-Ohio-243, ¶ 8 (Rules 44 through 47 of the Rules of Superintendence “are the sole vehicle for obtaining [court] records in actions commenced after July 1, 2009.”); see also *State ex rel. Bey v. Byrd*, 160 Ohio St.3d 141, 2020-Ohio-2766, ¶ 15 (while the Rules of Superintendence apply to case documents created on or after July 1, 2009, “[g]enerally it is not necessary to cite a particular rule or statute in support of a records request until the requester attempts to satisfy the more demanding standard applicable when claiming that he is entitled to a writ of mandamus to compel compliance with the request”).

⁷¹⁶ Sup.R. 47(A)(1); *State ex rel. Village of Richfield v. Laria*, 138 Ohio St.3d 168, 2014-Ohio-243, ¶ 8 (“Sup.R. 44 through 47 deal specifically with the procedures regulating public access to court records and are the sole vehicle for obtaining such records in actions commenced after July 1, 2009.”); see also *State ex rel. Ware v. Walsh*, 9th Dist. Summit No. 30051, 2021-Ohio-4585, ¶ 7-8 (because relator’s criminal case commenced before July 1, 2009, Sup.R. 44-47 were inapplicable to his request for personnel files, a serology report from his criminal case, his arrest report, and his direct indictment information sheet).

⁷¹⁷ Sup.R. 47(A)(2).

⁷¹⁸ Sup.R. 47(A)(3).

⁷¹⁹ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Waters*, 67 Ohio St.3d 321, 323-24 (1993).

⁷²⁰ *Crim.R. 6(E)*; *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Waters*, 67 Ohio St.3d 321, 323-25 (1993).

⁷²¹ *Juv.R. 37(B)*; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hunter*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-130072, 2013-Ohio-4459, ¶ 11.

⁷²² *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Winkler*, 101 Ohio St.3d 382, 2004-Ohio-1581, ¶ 12-13 (affirming the trial court’s sealing order per R.C. 2953.52 and concluding sealed records not subject to release).

⁷²³ *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 6, 9 (the response, “[t]here is no information available,” was a violation of R.C. 149.43(B)(3) requirement to provide a sufficient explanation, with legal authority, for the denial); *Woyt v. Woyt*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga Nos. 107312, 107321, 107322, 2019-Ohio-3758, ¶ 67 (“It should only be in the rarest circumstances that a court seals a case from public scrutiny.”). But see, R.C. 2953.36(F)(2) (for expunged records of human trafficking victims, “upon any inquiry” the court “shall reply that no record exists”).

⁷²⁴ *Schussheim v. Schussheim*, 137 Ohio St.3d 133, 2013-Ohio-4529, ¶ 3 (trial court may exercise inherent authority to seal records relating to a dissolved civil protection order without express statutory authority).

⁷²⁵ *State ex rel. Highlander v. Rudduck*, 103 Ohio St.3d 370, 2004-Ohio-4952, ¶ 11 (holding divorce records are not properly sealed when the order results from an agreed judgment entry and are not exempt from disclosure).

⁷²⁶ *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235, ¶ 27.

⁷²⁷ *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235.

⁷²⁸ *State v. Radcliff*, 142 Ohio St.3d 78, 2015-Ohio-235.

⁷²⁹ R.C. 2953.32.

⁷³⁰ Sup.R. 45(E)(1).

⁷³¹ Sup.R. 45(E)(1).

⁷³² Sup.R. 45(E)(2).

⁷³³ Sup.R. 45(E)(2)(a)-(c).

⁷³⁴ Sup.R. 45(E)(3).

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⁷³⁵ *State ex rel. Vindicator Printing Co. v. Wolff*, 132 Ohio St.3d 481, 2012-Ohio-3328, ¶ 34 (trial court improperly restricted public access to certain case documents because there was not clear and convincing evidence to establish the prejudicial effect of potential pre-trial publicity); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hunter*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-130072, 2013-Ohio-4459, ¶ 11-12 (the Rules of Superintendence do not permit a court to substitute initials for the full names of juveniles in delinquency cases; judge failed to present requisite clear and convincing evidence to justify substitution); *Woyt v. Woyt*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga Nos. 107312, 107321, 107322, 2019-Ohio-3758, ¶ 66 (holding that in divorce proceedings, “the trial court failed to identify any specific case document or part thereof and conduct a meaningful analysis as required by Sup.R 45(E)(2),” and “by sealing the entire case file, the court failed to use the least restrictive means available as required by Sup.R 45(E)(3)”; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Shanahan*, 166 Ohio St.3d 382, 2022-Ohio-448, ¶ 25-26 (judge improperly sealed a party’s affidavit because the sealing order was not supported by clear and convincing evidence of risk of injury to person, individual privacy rights and interest, or public safety); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Forsthoefel*, 170 Ohio St.3d 292, 2022-Ohio-3580, ¶ 15, 17 (judge improperly sealed case documents because there was no evidence in support of the decision; the judge “simply announced, without any analysis,” that the moving party’s motion was “well-taken”).

⁷³⁶ *Woyt v. Woyt*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga Nos. 107312, 107321, 107322, 2019-Ohio-3758, ¶ 66 (“by sealing the entire case file, the court failed to use the least restrictive means available as required by Sup.R. 45 (E)(3)”; *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Forsthoefel*, 170 Ohio St.3d 292, 2022-Ohio-3580, ¶ 15, 17 (with no evidence in support of the decision, judge erred in sweepingly sealing numerous case documents instead of using a less restrictive means of limiting public access).

⁷³⁷ 45 C.F.R. 160 *et seq.*; 45 C.F.R. 164 *et seq.*

⁷³⁸ Public Law No. 111-5, Division A, Title XIII, Subtitle D (2009). For additional information see <http://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/health-information-technology/index.html>.

⁷³⁹ 45 C.F.R. 160.103.

⁷⁴⁰ 45 C.F.R. 160.103.

⁷⁴¹ 45 C.F.R. 160.103.

⁷⁴² 45 C.F.R. 164.512(a).

⁷⁴³ *E.g.*, R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a) (providing for an exemption for “medical records”).

⁷⁴⁴ 45 C.F.R. 164.512(a).

⁷⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Daniels*, 108 Ohio St.3d 518, 2006-Ohio-1215, ¶ 25. *But see Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Health v. Lipson O’Shea Legal Group*, 145 Ohio St.3d 446, 2016-Ohio-556, ¶ 9 (noting that the public records request in *Daniels* was not “inextricably linked to ‘protected health information.’”).

⁷⁴⁶ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Daniels*, 108 Ohio St.3d 518, 2006-Ohio-1215, ¶ 25.

⁷⁴⁷ R.C. 149.43(a)(1)(v); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Daniels*, 108 Ohio St.3d 518, 2006-Ohio-1215, ¶ 25.

⁷⁴⁸ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Daniels*, 108 Ohio St.3d 518, 2006-Ohio-1215, ¶ 26, 34.

⁷⁴⁹ R.C. 1347.05.

⁷⁵⁰ R.C. 149.011(G).

⁷⁵¹ R.C. 1347.04(A)(1)(a).

⁷⁵² R.C. 1347.04(B).

⁷⁵³ R.C. 1347.04(B).

⁷⁵⁴ R.C. 1347.15(A)(1) (emphasis added).

⁷⁵⁵ R.C. 1347.01(E).

⁷⁵⁶ R.C. 1347.15(A)(1) (emphasis added)).

⁷⁵⁷ R.C. 1347.01(F).

⁷⁵⁸ R.C. 1347.01(F).

⁷⁵⁹ R.C. 1347.01 *et seq.*

⁷⁶⁰ R.C. 1347.15(A)(2) (excluding from definition of “state agency” courts or any judicial agency, any state-assisted institution of higher education, or any local agency); 2010 Ohio Att’y Gen. Ops. No. 016 (determining that the Ohio Board of Tax Appeals is a “judicial agency” for purposes of R.C. 1347.15).

⁷⁶¹ R.C. 1347.15(B).

⁷⁶² R.C. 1347.15(H)(1).

⁷⁶³ R.C. 1347.15(H)(2).

⁷⁶⁴ R.C. 1347.15(H)(3).

⁷⁶⁵ R.C. 1347.05(G).

⁷⁶⁶ R.C. 1347.10, 1347.15, 1347.99.

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Chapter Six: Enforcement and Liabilities

VI. Chapter Six: Enforcement and Liabilities

The Public Records Act is a “self-help” statute. This means that a person who believes that the Act has been violated must independently pursue a remedy, rather than ask a public official (such as the Ohio Attorney General) to initiate legal action on his or her behalf. If a public office or person responsible for public records fails to produce requested records, or otherwise fails to comply with the requirements of division (B) of the Public Records Act, the requester can file a lawsuit to 1) seek a writ of mandamus to enforce compliance and 2) apply for various sanctions. Alternatively, the requester may file a complaint in the Court of Claims, where there is a special statutory procedure for public records cases.

This Chapter discusses the basic aspects of both a mandamus suit and the Court of Claims procedure, along with the types of relief available.

A. Mandamus Lawsuit

1. Parties

A person allegedly “aggrieved by” a public office’s failure to comply with division (B) of the Public Records Act may file an action in mandamus⁷⁶⁷ against the public office or any person responsible for the office’s public records.⁷⁶⁸ A person may file a public records mandamus action regardless of pending related actions⁷⁶⁹ but may not seek compliance with a public records request in an action for other types of relief, like an injunction or declaratory judgment.⁷⁷⁰ The person who files the suit is called the “relator,” and the named public office or person responsible for the records is called the “respondent.” A relator can file a mandamus action or use the Court of Claims’ procedure, but not both.⁷⁷¹

2. Where to file

The relator can file the mandamus action in any one of three courts: the common pleas court of the county where the alleged violation occurred, the court of appeals for the appellate district where the alleged violation occurred, or the Supreme Court of Ohio.⁷⁷² If a relator files in the Supreme Court, the Court may refer the case to mediation counsel for a settlement conference.⁷⁷³

3. When to file

When an official responsible for records has denied a public records request, no administrative appeal to the official’s supervisor is necessary before filing a mandamus action in court.⁷⁷⁴ The likely statute of limitations for filing a public records mandamus action is within ten years after the cause of action accrues.⁷⁷⁵ However, the defense of laches may apply if the respondent can show that unreasonable and inexcusable delay in asserting a known right caused material prejudice to the respondent.⁷⁷⁶

4. Discovery

In general, the Ohio Rules of Civil Procedure govern discovery in a public records mandamus case, as in any other civil lawsuit.⁷⁷⁷ While discovery procedures are generally designed to ensure the free flow of accessible information,⁷⁷⁸ in a public records case, it is often the access to requested records that is in dispute. Instead of allowing a party to access the withheld records through discovery, the court will usually conduct an *in camera* inspection of the disputed records.⁷⁷⁹ An *in camera* inspection allows the court to view the unredacted records in private⁷⁸⁰ to determine whether the claimed exemption was appropriately applied. Not allowing the relator to view the unredacted records does not violate the relator’s due process rights.⁷⁸¹ Attorneys are required to prepare a log of the documents subject to the attorney-client privilege in the course of discovery,⁷⁸² but a public office is not required to provide such a log during the initial response to a public records request.⁷⁸³ In addition, law enforcement investigatory files sought in discovery may be entitled to a qualified common law privilege.⁷⁸⁴

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5. Requirements to prevail

A person is not entitled to file a mandamus action unless a prior request for records has already been made.⁷⁸⁵ Only those records that were requested from the public office can be litigated in the mandamus action.⁷⁸⁶

To be entitled to a writ of mandamus, the relator must prove that he or she has a clear legal right to the requested relief and that the respondent had a clear legal duty to perform the requested act.⁷⁸⁷ In a public records mandamus lawsuit, this usually includes specifying in the mandamus action the records withheld or other failure to comply with R.C. 149.43(B) and showing that, when the requester made the request, he or she specifically described the records being sought.⁷⁸⁸ Unlike most mandamus actions, a relator in a public records mandamus action need not prove the lack of an adequate remedy at law.⁷⁸⁹

If these requirements are met, the respondent then has the burden of proving in court that any items withheld are exempt from disclosure⁷⁹⁰ and of countering any other alleged violations of R.C. 149.43(B). In defending the action, the public office may rely on any applicable legal authority for withholding or redacting, even if the public office did not rely on that authority in response to the request.⁷⁹¹ Note, though, that a public office cannot claim that a request is ambiguous or overly broad for the first time in litigation. This is because when a public office claims a request is overly broad or ambiguous, a public office is required to give the requester a chance to revise the request by informing the requester of how the office's records are maintained and accessed.⁷⁹²

If necessary, the court, will review *in camera* the materials that were withheld or redacted.⁷⁹³ To the extent any doubt or ambiguity exists as to the applicability of an exemption, the public records law will be liberally interpreted in favor of disclosure.⁷⁹⁴

Note that if a respondent provides requested records to the relator after the filing of a public records mandamus action, all or part of the case may be rendered moot or concluded.⁷⁹⁵ Even if the case is rendered moot, the relator may still be entitled to statutory damages and attorney fees.⁷⁹⁶ Further, a court may still decide the merits of the case if the issue is capable of repetition yet evading review.⁷⁹⁷

6. Liabilities of the public office under the Public Records Act

If a court determines that the public office or the person responsible for public records failed to comply with an obligation contained in R.C. 149.43(B) and issues a writ of mandamus, the relator shall be entitled to an award of all court costs and may receive an award of attorney fees and/or statutory damages, as detailed below.⁷⁹⁸

a. Attorney fees

Any award of attorney fees is within the discretion of the court.⁷⁹⁹ A court may award reasonable attorney fees to a relator if:

- (1) The court orders the public office to comply with R.C. 149.43(B);⁸⁰⁰
- (2) The court determines that the public office failed to respond affirmatively or negatively to the public records request in accordance with the time allowed under R.C. 149.43(B);⁸⁰¹
- (3) The court determines that the public office promised to permit inspection or deliver copies within a specified period of time but failed to fulfill that promise;⁸⁰² or
- (4) The court determines that the public office acted in bad faith when it voluntarily made the public records available to the relator for the first time after the relator commenced the mandamus action but before the court issued any order.⁸⁰³

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In the last scenario, the relator may not conduct discovery on the issue of bad faith and the court may not presume bad faith by the public office.⁸⁰⁴

An award of fees is considered remedial rather than punitive⁸⁰⁵ and may be reduced or eliminated at the discretion of the court. A court may decline to award attorney fees if doing so would be disproportionate to the case.⁸⁰⁶ A court may also reduce an award of attorney fees if it determines that, given the facts of the specific case, an alternative means should have been pursued to resolve the public records dispute more effectively and efficiently.⁸⁰⁷

Only those attorney fees directly associated with the mandamus action may be awarded.⁸⁰⁸ The relator is entitled to fees only insofar as the requests have merit.⁸⁰⁹ Reasonable attorney fees also include reasonable fees incurred to produce proof of the reasonableness and amount of the fees and to otherwise litigate entitlement to the fees.⁸¹⁰ The attorney fees award shall not exceed the fees incurred before the public record was made available to the relator and the reasonable fees incurred to demonstrate entitlement to fees.⁸¹¹

A court shall *not* award any attorney fees if it determines both of the following:⁸¹²

- (1) Based on the law as it exists at the time, a well-informed person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would have believed that the conduct of the respondent did not constitute a failure to comply with an obligation of R.C. 149.43(B);⁸¹³

and

- (2) A well-informed person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would have believed that the conduct of the public office would serve the public policy that underlies the authority that it asserted as permitting that conduct.⁸¹⁴

The opportunity to collect attorney fees does not apply when the relator appears before the court *pro se* (without an attorney), even if the *pro se* relator is an attorney.⁸¹⁵ Neither the wages of in-house counsel⁸¹⁶ nor contingency fees are recoverable.⁸¹⁷

A relator may waive a claim for attorney fees (and statutory damages) by not including any argument in support of an award of fees in its merit brief.⁸¹⁸

b. Statutory damages

A person who transmits a valid written request for public records by hand delivery, electronic submission, or certified mail⁸¹⁹ is entitled to receive statutory damages if a court finds that the public office failed to comply with its obligations under R.C. 149.43(B).⁸²⁰ To be entitled to statutory damages, a requester must establish by clear and convincing evidence that the requester transmitted the request by hand delivery, electronic submission, or certified mail.⁸²¹

The award of statutory damages is not considered a penalty, but it is intended to compensate the requester for injury arising from lost use⁸²² of the requested information. The existence of injury arising from lost use shall be presumed. Merely failing to organize and maintain records, standing alone, does not support an award for statutory damages.⁸²³ Because statutory damages are intended to compensate for lost use, they are available when a public office fails to timely produce a public record.⁸²⁴

Statutory damages are fixed at \$100 for each business day the respondent fails to comply with R.C. 149.43(B), beginning with the day on which the relator files a mandamus action to recover statutory damages, up to a maximum of \$1,000.⁸²⁵ The Act “does not permit stacking of statutory damages based on what is essentially the same records request.”⁸²⁶

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A court shall *not* award statutory damages if it determines both of the following:

- (1) Based on the law as it exists at the time, a well-informed person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would have believed that the conduct of the respondent did not constitute a failure to comply with an obligation of R.C. 149.43(B);
- and
- (2) A well-informed person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would have believed that the conduct of the public office would serve the public policy that underlies the authority that it asserted as permitting that conduct.⁸²⁷

c. Court costs

An award of court costs is mandatory if the court orders the public office or the person responsible for the public records to comply with R.C. 149.43(B).⁸²⁸ Court costs shall also be awarded when a court determines that the public office or person responsible for public records acted in bad faith when making the requested records available after a mandamus action was filed but before the court ordered the production of the records.⁸²⁹ Like an award of attorney fees, an award of court costs is considered remedial rather than punitive.⁸³⁰ Litigation expenses, other than court costs, are not recoverable at all.⁸³¹

d. Recovery of deleted email records

The Supreme Court of Ohio has determined that if evidence shows that records in email format have been deleted in violation of a public office's records retention schedule, the public office has a duty to recover the contents of deleted emails and to provide access to them.⁸³² The courts will consider the relief available to the requester based on several factors, including whether: emails were improperly destroyed; forensic recovery of emails might be successful; and the proposed recovery efforts were reasonable.⁸³³

7. Liabilities applicable to either party

The following additional remedies may be available against a party in a public records mandamus action. They are applicable regardless of whether the party represents themselves ("*pro se*") or is represented by counsel.

a. Frivolous conduct

If the court does not issue a writ of mandamus and the court determines that bringing the mandamus action was frivolous conduct as defined in R.C. 2323.51(A), the court may award to the public office all court costs, expenses, and reasonable attorney fees, as determined by the court.⁸³⁴

Any party adversely affected by the frivolous conduct of another party may file a motion with the court, not more than 30 days after the entry of final judgment,⁸³⁵ for an award of court costs, reasonable attorney fees, and other reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the lawsuit or appeal.⁸³⁶ When a court determines that the accused party has engaged in frivolous conduct, a party adversely affected by the conduct may recover the full amount of the reasonable attorney fees incurred, even fees paid or in the process of being paid, or in the process of being paid by an insurance carrier.⁸³⁷

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b. Civil Rule 11

Civil Rule 11 provides, in part:

The signature of an attorney or *pro se* party constitutes a certificate by the attorney or party that the attorney or party has read the document; that to the best of the attorney's or party's knowledge, information, and belief there is good ground to support it; and that it is not interposed for delay . . . For a willful violation of this rule, an attorney or *pro se* party, upon motion of a party or upon the court's own motion, may be subjected to appropriate action, including an award to the opposing party of expenses and reasonable attorney fees incurred in bringing any motion under this rule.

Courts have found sanctionable conduct under Civil Rule 11 in public records cases.⁸³⁸ Any Civil Rule 11 motion must be filed within a reasonable period of time following the final judgment.⁸³⁹

B. Court of Claims Procedure

The other option available to requesters to resolve public records disputes is to file a complaint in the Ohio Court of Claims.⁸⁴⁰ R.C. 2743.75 provides a special statutory procedure for requesters to resolve public records disputes arising under the Public Records Act⁸⁴¹ in an expedited and economical way.⁸⁴² A requester can pursue either a mandamus action or resolution in the Court of Claims, but not both.⁸⁴³ The Court of Claims does not have jurisdiction in mandamus.⁸⁴⁴

1. Filing procedure and initial review

A requester may file a complaint in the Court of Claims on a form prescribed by the clerk of the Court of Claims, in either the common pleas court in the county where the public office is located or directly with the Court of Claims.⁸⁴⁵ The requester must attach to the complaint copies of the records request in dispute and any written responses or other communications about the request from the public office.⁸⁴⁶ The filing fee is \$25.⁸⁴⁷ If the requester files the complaint in a common pleas court, the clerk of that court will serve the complaint on the public office and then forward it to the Court of Claims for all further proceedings.⁸⁴⁸

When the Court of Claims receives a public records complaint, it will assign the complaint to a special master for review.⁸⁴⁹ A special master is an attorney who serves as a judicial officer in the Court of Claims; his or her recommended decisions are reviewed by a judge of the Court of Claims.⁸⁵⁰ The Court of Claims is able to dismiss the complaint on its own authority, if recommended by the special master.⁸⁵¹ The requester may also voluntarily dismiss his or her complaint at any time.⁸⁵² If the Court of Claims determines that the complaint constitutes a case of first impression that involves an issue of substantial public interest, the Court must dismiss the complaint and direct the requester to file a mandamus action in the appropriate court of appeals.⁸⁵³

2. Mediation

Once the complaint is served on the public office, the special master will refer the case to mediation.⁸⁵⁴ While in mediation, the case is stayed—that is, action in the case is suspended until mediation concludes.⁸⁵⁵ Mediation may occur by telephone or any other electronic means.⁸⁵⁶ If mediation fully resolves the dispute between the parties, the case is dismissed.⁸⁵⁷ The special master can also determine, in consideration of the particular circumstances of the case and the interests of justice, that the case should not be referred to mediation at all.⁸⁵⁸ If mediation does not fully resolve the dispute, the mediation stay terminates, and the case proceeds.⁸⁵⁹

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3. Expedited briefing

After mediation terminates, the public office has ten business days to file a response to the complaint.⁸⁶⁰ The public office may also file a motion to dismiss, if applicable.⁸⁶¹ No other motions or pleadings—other than the complaint, response, and/or motion to dismiss—will be accepted by the Court of Claims in the matter.⁸⁶² The special master may direct the parties in writing to file any additional motions, pleadings, information, or documentation, if needed.⁸⁶³ No discovery is permitted, and the parties may support their pleadings with affidavits.⁸⁶⁴ Unless the special master orders otherwise, the parties must provide all their evidence with their pleadings.⁸⁶⁵

The Court of Claims can only resolve disputes related to the public records request identified in the complaint. Thus, if a requester makes a new request during mediation or at any time after filing their complaint, the Court of Claims does not have jurisdiction to adjudicate disputes related to the new request.⁸⁶⁶

4. Requirements to prevail

Proceedings in the Court of Claims are consistent with the burden of proof standards in public records mandamus actions.⁸⁶⁷ That is, the requester must plead and prove facts showing that they sought public records and the public office or records custodian did not make the records available.⁸⁶⁸ The requester must establish entitlement to relief by clear and convincing evidence.⁸⁶⁹ The public office or person responsible for the records has the burden of establishing that an exemption applies.⁸⁷⁰ The public office or person responsible fails to meet that burden if it does not prove that the requested records fall squarely within the exemption.⁸⁷¹ For proceedings in the Court of Claims, the Supreme Court of Ohio has clarified that a public office or person responsible for the records must produce competent, admissible evidence to support the exemption claimed by the public office.⁸⁷²

Within seven business days of receiving the public office's response to the complaint or motion to dismiss, the special master must submit a report and recommendation to the Court of Claims.⁸⁷³ A report and recommendation is a written statement of findings by the special master and a proposal for the Court of Claims about how the case should be resolved.⁸⁷⁴ All parties will receive a copy of the report and recommendation.⁸⁷⁵ The parties have seven business days after receipt of the report and recommendation to file a written objection.⁸⁷⁶ The objection must be specific and state with particularity all grounds for the objection, and must be served on the opposing party via certified mail, return receipt requested.⁸⁷⁷ If a party objects, the other party may file a response to the objection within seven business days and serve the response on the opposing party via certified mail, return receipt requested.⁸⁷⁸

If neither party timely objects, the Court of Claims must issue an order adopting the report and recommendation unless there is an error evident on its face.⁸⁷⁹ There can be no appeal from this decision unless the Court of Claims materially altered the report and recommendation.⁸⁸⁰ If one or more of the parties objected to the report and recommendation, the Court of Claims must issue a final order within seven business days after the final response(s) to the objection(s) is received.⁸⁸¹

If no appeal is taken and the Court of Claims determines that the public office denied access to public records in violation of R.C. 149.43(B), the Court of Claims must order the public office to permit access to the public records, and to reimburse the requester for the \$25 filing fee and any other costs associated with the action that were incurred by the requester.⁸⁸² The requester is not entitled to recover attorney fees or other monetary relief.⁸⁸³

5. Appeals from the Court of Claims

Either party may appeal the final order from the Court of Claims to the court of appeals for the appellate district where the public office is located.⁸⁸⁴ Any appeal must be given precedence to ensure a prompt decision.⁸⁸⁵

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If the appellate court finds that the public office obviously filed an appeal with the intent to delay compliance with R.C. 149.43(B) or unduly harass the requester, the court of appeals may award reasonable attorney fees to the requester pursuant to R.C. 149.43(C).⁸⁸⁶ No discovery can be taken on this issue, and the court is not to presume that the appeal was filed with intent to delay or harass.⁸⁸⁷

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Notes:

- ⁷⁶⁷ R.C. 149.43(C)(1)(b); *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 12 (“Mandamus is the appropriate remedy to compel compliance with R.C. 149.43, Ohio’s Public Records Act.”). “Mandamus” is a court command to a governmental office to correctly perform a mandatory function. Black’s Law Dictionary (10th Ed. 2014).
- ⁷⁶⁸ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Schweikert*, 38 Ohio St.3d 170, 174 (1988) (mandamus need not be brought against the person who actually withheld the records or committed the violation; it can be brought against any “person responsible” for public records in the public office); *State ex rel. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers v. Gosser*, 20 Ohio St.3d 30 (1985), paragraph two of the syllabus (“When statutes impose a duty on a particular official to oversee records, that official is the ‘person responsible’ under [the Public Records Act].”); *State ex rel. Doe v. Tetrault*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2011-10-070, 2012-Ohio-3879, ¶ 23-26 (employee who created and disposed of requested notes was not the “particular official” charged with the duty to oversee records); see also Chapter One: C. 3. “Quasi-agency: a private entity, even if not a ‘public office,’ can be ‘a person responsible for public records.’”
- ⁷⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Highlander v. Rudduck*, 103 Ohio St.3d 370, 2004-Ohio-4952, ¶ 18.
- ⁷⁷⁰ *Davis v. Cincinnati Enquirer*, 164 Ohio App.3d 36, 2005-Ohio-5719, ¶ 8-17; *Reeves v. Chief of Police*, 6th Dist. Erie No. E-14-124, 2015-Ohio-3075, ¶ 7-8 (affirming dismissal of a public records case brought as a declaratory judgment action); *State ex rel. Meadows v. Louisville City Council*, 5th Stark Dist. No. 2015CA00040, 2015-Ohio-4126, ¶ 26-29.
- ⁷⁷¹ R.C. 149.43(C)(1); R.C. 2743.75(C)(1); *State ex rel. Sultaana v. Mansfield Corr. Inst.*, 172 Ohio St.3d 438, 2023-Ohio-1177, ¶ 10 (incident and conduct reports did not fall under any category in R.C. 5120.21 and not exempt).
- ⁷⁷² R.C. 149.43(C)(1)(b).
- ⁷⁷³ S.Ct.Prac.R. 19.01(A) (the court may, on its own or on motion by a party, refer cases to mediation; unless otherwise ordered court, all filing deadlines stayed). Other courts may also offer mediation to facilitate settlement.
- ⁷⁷⁴ *State ex rel. Multimedia, Inc. v. Whalen*, 48 Ohio St.3d 41, 42 (1990).
- ⁷⁷⁵ R.C. 2305.14.
- ⁷⁷⁶ *State ex rel. Clinton v. MetroHealth Sys.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 100590, 2014-Ohio-4469, ¶ 38-41 (finding three-year delay in filing action to enforce public records request untimely).
- ⁷⁷⁷ See Civ.R. 26-37, 45.
- ⁷⁷⁸ *Vaught v. Cleveland Clinic Found.*, 98 Ohio St.3d 485, 2003-Ohio-2181, ¶ 25.
- ⁷⁷⁹ *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 22; *State ex rel. Hogan Lovells U.S., L.L.P. v. Dept. of Rehab. and Corr.*, 156 Ohio St.3d 56, 2018-Ohio-5133, ¶ 6. But see *State ex rel. Plunderbund v. Born*, 141 Ohio St.3d 422, 2014-Ohio-3679, ¶ 31 (in camera review was unnecessary when testimonial evidence sufficiently showed all withheld records were subject to the claimed exemption).
- ⁷⁸⁰ Black’s Law Dictionary (10th ed. 2014) (defining “in camera inspection” as “[a] trial judge’s private consideration of evidence”).
- ⁷⁸¹ *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 23.
- ⁷⁸² Civ.R. 26(B)(6); *Cargotec, Inc. v. Westchester Fire Ins. Co.*, 155 Ohio App.3d 653, 2003-Ohio-7257, ¶ 10.
- ⁷⁸³ *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 24.
- ⁷⁸⁴ *Henneman v. Toledo*, 35 Ohio St.3d 241, 245 (1988); *J & C Marketing, L.L.C. v. McGinty*, 143 Ohio St.3d 315, 2015-Ohio-1310, ¶ 17-22.
- ⁷⁸⁵ *State ex rel. Taxpayers Coalition v. Lakewood*, 86 Ohio St.3d 385, 390 (1999); *Strothers v. Norton*, 131 Ohio St.3d 359, 2012-Ohio-1007, ¶ 14.
- ⁷⁸⁶ *State ex rel. Lanham v. Smith*, 112 Ohio St.3d 527, 2007-Ohio-609, ¶ 14 (“R.C. 149.43(C) requires a prior request as a prerequisite to a mandamus action.”).
- ⁷⁸⁷ *State ex rel. Van Gundy v. Indus. Comm.*, 111 Ohio St.3d 395, 2006-Ohio-5854, ¶ 13 (discussing mandamus requirements).
- ⁷⁸⁸ *State ex rel. Glaslos v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 17; *State ex rel. Morgan v. New Lexington*, 112 Ohio St.3d 33, 2006-Ohio-6365, ¶ 29 (“[I]t is the responsibility of the person who wishes to inspect and/or copy records to identify with reasonable clarity the records at issue.”).
- ⁷⁸⁹ *State ex rel. Gaydosh v. Twinsburg*, 93 Ohio St.3d 576, 580 (2001).
- ⁷⁹⁰ *Gilbert v. Summit Cty.*, 104 Ohio St.3d 660, 2004-Ohio-7108, ¶ 6.
- ⁷⁹¹ R.C. 149.43(B)(3).
- ⁷⁹² *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St.3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585, ¶ 74 (public office violated the Public Records Act when it raised overbreadth of request for the first time in litigation because the requester was not given the opportunity to revise the request); see also Chapter Two: A.6. “Denying, and then clarifying, an overly broad request.”
- ⁷⁹³ *State ex rel. Seballos v. School Emp. Retirement Sys.*, 70 Ohio St.3d 667, 671 (1994); *State ex rel. Lanham v. DeWine*, 135 Ohio St.3d 191, 2013-Ohio-199, ¶ 21-22. But see *State ex rel. Plunderbund v. Born*, 141 Ohio St.3d 422, 2014-Ohio-3679, ¶ 29-31 (denying motion to submit documents in camera when respondents showed that all withheld documents were “security records” under R.C. 149.433).
- ⁷⁹⁴ *State ex rel. Bardwell v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 127 Ohio St.3d 202, 2010-Ohio-5073, ¶ 10.
- ⁷⁹⁵ *State ex rel. Pietrangelo v. Avon Lake*, 149 Ohio St.3d 273, 2016-Ohio-5725, ¶ 15-22.
- ⁷⁹⁶ R.C. 149.43(C)(2) (statutory damages); R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b).
- ⁷⁹⁷ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ohio Dept. of Public Safety*, 148 Ohio St.3d 433, 2016-Ohio-7987, ¶ 29-31.
- ⁷⁹⁸ Public offices may still be liable for the content of public records they release, e.g., in a defamation action against an office. See *Mehta v. Ohio Univ.*, 194 Ohio App.3d 844, 2011-Ohio-3484, ¶ 63 (10th Dist.) (“[T]here is no legal authority in Ohio providing for blanket immunity from defamation for any and all content included within a public record.”).
- ⁷⁹⁹ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b) (stating “the court may award” attorney fees).
- ⁸⁰⁰ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b).
- ⁸⁰¹ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b)(i); *State ex rel. Caster v. Columbus*, 151 Ohio St.3d 425, 2016-Ohio-8394, ¶ 49-51 (awarding attorney fees because public office failed to respond to request); *Cleveland Assn. of Rescue Employees/ILA Local 1975 v. City of Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 106783, 2018-Ohio-4602, ¶ 4, 19 (awarding attorney fees because request went unanswered until mandamus action was filed, and the public office’s two-month delay in responding to part of the request and a five-month delay to answer the entire request were unreasonable).
- ⁸⁰² R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b)(ii).
- ⁸⁰³ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b)(iii).
- ⁸⁰⁴ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(b)(iii).
- ⁸⁰⁵ R.C. 149.43(C)(4)(a); R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(a)(i).
- ⁸⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Pool v. City of Sheffield Lake*, 172 Ohio St.3d 453, 2023-Ohio-1204, ¶ 31-32 (declining to award fees claimed for the public office’s three-day delay in making a supplemental production of records because “any harm or inconvenience [the requester] suffered...presumably represents a small fraction of the total fees and expenses he incurred throughout this litigation” and would be disproportionate); *State ex rel. Gilreath v. Cuyahoga Job & Family Servs.*, S. Ct. No. 2022-0824, 2024-Ohio-103, ¶ 50 (declining to award fees because, even after the public office produced all responsive records and informed requester that it had no additional records, requester “proceeded to conduct extensive discovery in the case by propounding numerous interrogatories, requests for admissions, and requests for production of documents and by deposing three [public office] employees”).

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⁸⁰⁷ R.C. 149.43(C)(4)(d).

⁸⁰⁸ *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Information Network v. Petro*, 81 Ohio St.3d 1234, 1236 (1998) (determining that fees incurred as a result of other efforts to obtain the same records were not related to the mandamus action and were excluded from the award); *State ex rel. Quolke v. Strongsville City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 99733, 2013-Ohio-4481, ¶ 10-11 (reducing attorney fees award because counsel billed for time that did not advance public records case or was extraneous to the case).

⁸⁰⁹ *State ex rel. Cranford v. Cleveland*, 103 Ohio St.3d 196, 2004-Ohio-4884, ¶ 25 (denying relator attorney fees based on “meritless request”).

⁸¹⁰ R.C. 149.43(C)(4)(c); *State ex rel. Miller v. Brady*, 123 Ohio St.3d 255, 2009-Ohio-4942, ¶ 19.

⁸¹¹ R.C. 149.43(C)(4)(b), (c).

⁸¹² R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(c); see *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Ronan*, 127 Ohio St.3d 236, 2010-Ohio-5680, ¶ 17 (even if court had found denial of request contrary to statute, requester would not have been entitled to attorney fees because the public office’s conduct was reasonable); *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Sage*, 143 Ohio St.3d 392, 2015-Ohio-974, ¶ 37 (courts first decide whether to award attorney fees and then conduct analysis of factors outlined in statute to determine amount of fees).

⁸¹³ *State ex rel. Anderson v. Vermilion*, 134 Ohio St.3d 120, 2012-Ohio-5320, ¶ 26; *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 39; *State ex rel. Hicks v. Fraley*, 166 Ohio St.3d 141, 2021-Ohio-2724, ¶ 27 (denying award of attorney fees because a well-informed public official would have believed the letter at issue was protected under attorney-client privilege).

⁸¹⁴ *State ex rel. Rogers v. Dept. of Rehab. and Corr.*, 155 Ohio St.3d 545, 2018-Ohio-5111, ¶ 36 (attorney fees awarded because withholding security-camera video documenting guard-prisoner interaction was unreasonable and release of records benefits the public by allowing public to “receive at least some information about prisoner behavior and prisoners’ treatment”); *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 40.

⁸¹⁵ *State ex rel. O’Shea & Assocs. Co., L.P.A v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 131 Ohio St.3d 149, 2012-Ohio-115, ¶ 45.

⁸¹⁶ *State ex rel. Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 104 Ohio St.3d 399, 2004-Ohio-6557, ¶ 62; *State ex rel. Bott Law Group, L.L.C. v. Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 12AP-448, 2013-Ohio-5219, ¶ 46 (award of attorney fees not available to relator law firm when no evidence that the firm paid or was obligated to pay any attorney to pursue the public records action).

⁸¹⁷ *State ex rel. Hous. Advocates, Inc. v. Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 96243, 2012-Ohio-1187, ¶ 6-7 (in-house counsel taking case on contingent fee basis not entitled to award of attorney fees).

⁸¹⁸ *State ex rel. Data Trace Information Servs., L.L.C. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Fiscal Officer*, 131 Ohio St.3d 255, 2012-Ohio-753, ¶ 69, citing *State ex rel. Mun. Constr. Equip. Operators’ Labor Council v. Cleveland*, 114 Ohio St.3d 183, 2007-Ohio-3831, ¶ 83.

⁸¹⁹ *State ex rel. Pietrangelo v. Avon Lake*, 149 Ohio St.3d 273, 2016-Ohio-5725, ¶ 23-27 (examining evidence of hand delivery); *State ex rel. McDougald v. Greene*, 161 Ohio St.3d 130, 2020-Ohio-3686, ¶ 18 (denying award of statutory damages when relator delivered public records request through prison “kite system” (system of delivering written messages between prison inmates and staff)); see also *State ex rel. Petranek v. Cleveland*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 98026, 2012-Ohio-2396, ¶ 8 (later repeat request by certified mail does not trigger entitlement to statutory damages); *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 164 Ohio St.3d 583, 2021-Ohio-2061, ¶ 24 (letter sent by certified mail that only generally described previous requests was not a qualifying communication for purposes of statutory damages); *State ex rel. Sulstana v. Mansfield Corr. Inst.*, Slip. Op. No. 2022-0702, 2023-Ohio-1177, ¶ 49 (delivery by fax is not an authorized method of delivery for purposes of statutory damages).

⁸²⁰ R.C. 149.43(C)(2). Compare *State ex rel. Caster v. Columbus*, 151 Ohio St.3d 425, 2016-Ohio-8394, ¶ 52 (awarding statutory damages) with *State ex rel. Ware v. DeWine*, 163 Ohio St.3d 332, 2020-Ohio-5148, ¶ 24-25 (upholding denial of statutory damages when evidence showed that public office satisfied duty to make records available by mailing them to relator in correctional institution; relator’s claim that he did not receive the records was beyond control of the public office and not a basis for awarding statutory damages).

⁸²¹ *State ex rel. McDougald v. Greene*, 161 Ohio St.3d 130, 2020-Ohio-3686, ¶ 27; *State ex rel. Ware v. Walsh*, 9th Dist. Summit No. 30051, 2021-Ohio-4585, ¶ 21 (requester not entitled to statutory damages because he did not show, by clear and convincing evidence, that he sent request by certified mail; time stamp on certified mail receipt did not match date of mailing and there was no evidence of a signed return receipt).

⁸²² R.C. 149.43(C)(2); *State ex rel. Ware v. City of Akron*, 164 Ohio St.3d 557, 2021-Ohio-624, ¶ 19 (requester does not have to show an actual injury connected to the loss of records to be awarded statutory damages; “requiring a requester to make even a minimal showing of actual injury would be contrary to the statutory command that injury is conclusively presumed”).

⁸²³ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, Slip. Op. No. 2022-0148, 2023-Ohio-3382, ¶ 42.

⁸²⁴ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, Slip. Op. No. 2022-0148, 2023-Ohio-3382, ¶ 41.

⁸²⁵ R.C. 149.43(C)(2); see also *State ex rel. Miller v. Ohio Dept. of Edn.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 15AP-1168, 2016-Ohio-8534, ¶ 9-13 (statutory damages begin accruing on day mandamus action is filed but does not include day records are provided).

⁸²⁶ *State ex rel. Dehler v. Kelly*, 127 Ohio St.3d 309, 2010-Ohio-5724, ¶ 4; *State ex rel. Ware v. Parikh*, 172 Ohio St.3d 49, 2023-Ohio-2536, ¶ 31 (holding that eight requests submitted by the same requester on the same day were a single request for purposes of statutory damages); *State ex rel. Bristow v. Baxter*, 6th Dist. Erie No. E-18-026, 2019-Ohio-214, ¶ 43 (while the Public Records Act does not permit stacking of statutory damages based on what is essentially the same records request, relator was entitled to the maximum award of \$1,000 per category of requested records -- personnel files, time-off requests, and public records policy -- for a total statutory damages award of \$3,000).

⁸²⁷ R.C. 149.43(C)(2); *State ex rel. Rogers v. Dept. of Rehab. and Corr.*, 155 Ohio St.3d 545, 2018-Ohio-5111, ¶ 25 (declining to reduce statutory damages award, in part because “there was no statutory or precedential force behind [public office’s] arguments that the security footage was an exception to the definition of a ‘public record’”); *State ex rel. Hicks v. Fraley*, 166 Ohio St. 3d 141, 2021-Ohio-2724, ¶ 28 (denying award of statutory damages because a well-informed public official would have believed the letter at issue was protected by attorney-client privilege).

⁸²⁸ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(a)(i).

⁸²⁹ R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(a)(ii); *State ex rel. Ware v. Funkhauser*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2021-P-0056, 2022-Ohio-172, ¶ 9 (awarding court costs because public office acted in bad faith when it “consciously disregarded” the requests for over one year and complied over two months after requester filed a mandamus complaint).

⁸³⁰ R.C. 149.43(C)(4)(a); R.C. 149.43(C)(3)(a)(i).

⁸³¹ *State ex rel. Doe v. Smith*, 123 Ohio St.3d 44, 2009-Ohio-4149, ¶ 10, 46 (reversing award of litigation expenses).

⁸³² *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 31-32, 41 (noting that board did not contest the status of the requested emails as public records).

⁸³³ *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Seneca Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 120 Ohio St.3d 372, 2008-Ohio-6253, ¶ 51 (when newspaper sought to inspect improperly deleted emails, the public office had to bear the expense of forensic recovery).

⁸³⁴ R.C. 149.43(C)(5).

⁸³⁵ *State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 144 Ohio St.3d 571, 2015-Ohio-4915, ¶ 10-12 (motion filed pursuant to R.C. 2323.51 must be rejected if not filed within 30 days).

⁸³⁶ R.C. 2323.51; *State ex rel. Davis v. Metzger*, 145 Ohio St.3d 405, 2016-Ohio-1026, ¶ 9-13 (affirming sanctions against requester’s attorney for frivolous mandamus action and discovery).

⁸³⁷ *State ex rel. Striker v. Cline*, 130 Ohio St.3d 214, 2011-Ohio-5350, ¶ 7, 23-25; *State ex rel. Davis v. Metzger*, 5th Dist. Licking No. 11-CA-130, 2014-Ohio-4555, ¶ 13-14 (noting that requester filed mandamus within hours of being told request was being reviewed, did not dismiss action after receiving the records later that same day, and conducted unwarranted discovery); *State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 144 Ohio St.3d 571,

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2015-Ohio-4915, ¶ 15 (noting that frivolous conduct must be egregious and “is not proved merely by winning a legal battle or by proving that a party’s factual assertions were incorrect”).

⁸³⁸ *State ex rel. Bardwell v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 127 Ohio St.3d 202, 2010-Ohio-5073, ¶ 15-17; *State ex rel. Verhovec v. Marietta*, 4th Dist. Washington Nos. 11CA29, 12CA52, 12CA53, 13CA1, 13CA2, 2013-Ohio-5414, ¶ 44-94 (relator engaged in frivolous conduct under Civ. R. 11 by feigning interest in records access when his actual intent was to seek forfeiture award); *State ex rel. Bristow v. Baxter*, 6th Dist. Erie Nos. E-17-060, E-17-067, E-17-070, 2018-Ohio-1973, ¶ 26 (denying motion for sanctions because, even assuming counsel violated Civ.R. 11, there was no evidence that counsel did so willfully or in bad faith).

⁸³⁹ *State ex rel. DiFranco v. S. Euclid*, 144 Ohio St.3d 571, 2015-Ohio-4915, ¶ 18 (filing a Civ.R. 11 motion two years after final judgment in public records case was not within a reasonable period of time). An award or denial of [Civil Rule 11](#) sanctions is reviewed on appeal under an abuse of discretion standard. See *State ex rel. Pietrangelo v. Avon Lake*, 146 Ohio St.3d 292, 2016-Ohio-2974, ¶ 19.

⁸⁴⁰ R.C. 2743.75.

⁸⁴¹ R.C. 2743.75(A); *Jabr v. Disciplinary Counsel*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00596PQ, 2021-Ohio-398 (under R.C. 2743.75(A), Court of Claims has jurisdiction to resolve disputes arising under the Public Records Act and cannot adjudicate actions to enforce violation of Rules of Superintendence).

⁸⁴² R.C. 2743.75(A).

⁸⁴³ R.C. 2743.75(C)(1); *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 12.

⁸⁴⁴ *State ex rel. Sultaana v. Mansfield Corr. Inst.*, Slip. Op. No. 2022-0702, 2023-Ohio-1177, ¶ 10 (a requester cannot transfer a mandamus case from a court of common pleas, court of appeals, or the Supreme Court of Ohio to the Court of Claims because the Court of Claims does not have jurisdiction in mandamus).

⁸⁴⁵ R.C. 2743.75(D)(1); R.C. 2743.75(B).

⁸⁴⁶ R.C. 2743.75(D)(1).

⁸⁴⁷ R.C. 2743.75(D)(1).

⁸⁴⁸ R.C. 2743.75(D)(1).

⁸⁴⁹ R.C. 2743.75(D)(2).

⁸⁵⁰ R.C. 2743.75(A).

⁸⁵¹ R.C. 2743.75(D)(2).

⁸⁵² R.C. 2743.75(D)(2).

⁸⁵³ R.C. 2743.75(C)(2). A “case of first impression” is simply one that presents the court with an issue of law that has not previously been decided by any controlling legal authority in that jurisdiction. See *Black’s Law Dictionary* (10th ed. 2014) (defining “case of first impression”).

⁸⁵⁴ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1).

⁸⁵⁵ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1).

⁸⁵⁶ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1).

⁸⁵⁷ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1).

⁸⁵⁸ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1); *Meros v. Office of Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2023-00146PQ, 2023-Ohio-1861, ¶ 10 (special master did not err in refusing to refer case to mediation).

⁸⁵⁹ R.C. 2743.75(E)(1).

⁸⁶⁰ R.C. 2743.75(E)(2).

⁸⁶¹ R.C. 2743.75(E)(2).

⁸⁶² R.C. 2743.75(E)(2).

⁸⁶³ R.C. 2743.75(E)(2), (E)(3)(c).

⁸⁶⁴ R.C. 2743.75(E)(3)(a), (b).

⁸⁶⁵ R.C. 2743.75(E)(3); *Isreal v. Franklin Cty. Commrs.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00548PQ, 2019-Ohio-5457, ¶ 14 (rejecting relator’s attempt to supplement the record with exhibits to his objections because “R.C. 2743.75(F)(2) does not expressly permit parties to engage in motion practice after a R&R, objection, or response to submitted to the court”), *aff’d*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 20AP-51, 2021-Ohio-3824.

⁸⁶⁶ *Mentch v. City of Cleveland*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2020-00535PQ, 2021-Ohio 1564, ¶ 19 (jurisdiction of Court of Claims is limited to the public records request set forth in the complaint; Court thus cannot adjudicate disputes related to new requests made during litigation).

⁸⁶⁷ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 32.

⁸⁶⁸ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 33.

⁸⁶⁹ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 34; *Viola v. Ohio AG’s Office*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 21AP-126, 2021-Ohio-3828, ¶ 20-21 (requester’s belief that public official’s personal email account “may” contain public records is not clear and convincing evidence necessary to establish that public office improperly processed request).

⁸⁷⁰ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 35.

⁸⁷¹ *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 35, 63.

⁸⁷² *Welsh-Huggins v. Jefferson Cty. Prosecutor’s Office*, 163 Ohio St.3d 337, 2020-Ohio-5371, ¶ 53.

⁸⁷³ R.C. 2743.75(F)(1). However, “the special master may extend the seven-day period for the submission of the report and recommendation to the court...by an additional seven business days” “[f]or good cause shown[.]” R.C. 2743.75(F)(1).

⁸⁷⁴ R.C. 2743.75(F)(1).

⁸⁷⁵ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁷⁶ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁷⁷ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁷⁸ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁷⁹ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁸⁰ R.C. 2743.75(G)(1).

⁸⁸¹ R.C. 2743.75(F)(2).

⁸⁸² R.C. 2743.75(F)(3); but see *White v. Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2018-00762PQ, 2019-Ohio-472, ¶ 22 (assessing court costs against requester because requester did not permit the public office a reasonable period of time to respond by prematurely filing his claim five business days after transmission of twenty-three separate public records requests).

⁸⁸³ R.C. 2743.75(F)(3)(b); *Ryan v. City of Ashtabula*, Ct. of Cl. Nos. 2022-00660PQ, 2022-00665PQ, 2022-00680PQ, 2023-Ohio-621, ¶ 23.

⁸⁸⁴ R.C. 2743.75(G)(1); *Sheil v. Horton*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 107329, 2018-Ohio-5240, ¶ 4.

⁸⁸⁵ R.C. 2743.75(G)(1).

⁸⁸⁶ R.C. 2743.75(G)(2).

⁸⁸⁷ R.C. 2743.75(G)(2).

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Chapter Seven: Other Obligations of a Public Office

VII. Chapter Seven: Other Obligations of a Public Office

In addition to producing public records, the Public Records Act and other statutes impose obligations on public offices on how records are kept and managed. These include, but are not limited to:

- Managing and organizing public records such that they can be made available for copying and inspection in response to a public records request,⁸⁸⁸ and ensuring that all records – public or not – are maintained and disposed of only in accordance with properly adopted, applicable records retention schedules;⁸⁸⁹
- Maintaining a copy of the office’s current records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public;⁸⁹⁰
- Adopting and posting an office public records policy;⁸⁹¹ and
- Ensuring that all elected officials associated with the public office, or their designees, obtain three hours of certified public records training once during each term of office to ensure that public offices are aware of these obligations.⁸⁹²

Using its Star Rating System (StaRS), the Auditor of State evaluates, rates, and reports on each public office’s compliance with these requirements and with best practices.⁸⁹³ These reports and ratings can be found on the Auditor of State’s Website.⁸⁹⁴

A. Records Management

A good records management system is a crucial component to government transparency. Records and the information they contain must be well-managed to ensure accountability, efficiency, economy, and overall good government.

The term “records management” encompasses two distinct obligations of a public office, each of which furthers the goals of the Public Records Act. First, to facilitate broader access to public records, a public office must organize and maintain the public records it keeps in a manner such that they can be made available for inspection or copying in response to a public records request.⁸⁹⁵

Second, Ohio’s records retention law, R.C. 149.351, helps facilitate transparency in government and is one means of preventing the circumvention of the Public Records Act.⁸⁹⁶ R.C. 149.351 prohibits the removal, destruction, mutilation, transfer, damage, or disposal of any record or part of a record, except as provided by law or under the rules adopted by the records commissions (i.e., pursuant to approved records retention schedules).⁸⁹⁷

Records that do not fall within an approved retention schedule, or law that permits their destruction cannot be destroyed and must be maintained until the public office can adopt a retention schedule that permits their destruction. In the meantime, those records remain subject to public records requests. The process for adopting records retention schedules, and resources available to public offices for doing so, are described below.

But, not all documents received by a public office are “records” that must be maintained and produced upon request.⁸⁹⁸ Ohio law provides that a public office shall only create records that are, “necessary for the adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and for the protection of the legal and financial rights of the state and persons directly affected by the agency’s activities.”⁸⁹⁹ This standard only addresses the records required to be *created* by a public office. A public office may also *receive* many items in addition to those it creates. Those items might—or might not—meet the definition of a “record” that must also be retained and disposed of in accordance with records retention schedules. A public office must apply the definition of a “record” found in R.C. 149.011(G) to determine whether a particular item must be maintained and produced.

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1. Records management programs

a. Local government records commissions

Ohio law provides the process through which local governments may dispose of records in accordance with rules adopted by records commissions at the county,⁹⁰⁰ township,⁹⁰¹ and municipal⁹⁰² levels. Records commissions also exist for each library district,⁹⁰³ special taxing district,⁹⁰⁴ school district,⁹⁰⁵ and educational service center.⁹⁰⁶

Records commissions are responsible for reviewing applications for one-time disposal of obsolete records, as well as records retention schedules submitted by government offices within their jurisdiction. Once a records commission has approved an application or schedule, it is forwarded to the State Archives at the Ohio History Connection for review and identification of records⁹⁰⁷ that the State Archives deems to be of continuing historical value.⁹⁰⁸ Upon completion of that process, the Ohio History Connection will forward the application or schedule to the Auditor of State for approval or disapproval.⁹⁰⁹

b. State records program

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) administers the records program for all state agencies,⁹¹⁰ except for state-supported institutions of higher education, and upon request for the legislative and judicial branches of government.⁹¹¹ Among its other duties, the state records program is responsible for establishing “general schedules” for the disposal of certain types of records common to most state agencies. State agencies must affirmatively adopt existing general schedules within the Records and Information Management System (RIMS), that they wish to utilize.⁹¹² Once a general schedule has been officially adopted by a state agency, when the time specified in the general schedule has elapsed, the records identified should no longer have sufficient administrative, legal, fiscal, or other value to warrant further preservation by the state.⁹¹³

If a state agency keeps a record series that does not fit into an existing state general schedule, or if it wishes to modify the language of a general schedule to better suit its needs, the state agency can submit its own proposed retention schedules to DAS online via RIMS for approval by DAS, the Auditor of State, and the State Archivist.⁹¹⁴

The State’s records program works in a similar fashion to local records commissions, except that applications and schedules are first submitted to the DAS state records program for it to recommend approval, rejection, or modification. DAS then forwards its recommendation to State Archives and to the Auditor of State.⁹¹⁵ The State Auditor decides whether to approve, reject, or modify applications and schedules based on the continuing administrative and fiscal value of the state records to the state or to its citizens.⁹¹⁶ If the Auditor does not approve the application and schedule, the state agency will be notified. State Archives will review the proposed schedule to identify records which may have enduring historical value which should be preserved.

c. Records program for state-supported colleges and universities

State-supported institutions of higher education are unique in that their records programs are established and administered by their respective boards of trustees rather than a separate records commission or the State’s records program.⁹¹⁷ Through their records programs, these state offices are charged with applying efficient and economical management methods to the creation, utilization, maintenance, retention, preservation, and disposition of records.⁹¹⁸

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2. Records retention and disposition

a. Retention schedules

Records of a public office may be destroyed, but only if they are destroyed in compliance with a properly-approved records retention schedule.⁹¹⁹ However, if the retention schedule does not address the particular type of record in question, the record must be kept until the schedule is properly amended to address that category of records.⁹²⁰ Also, if a public record is retained beyond its properly-approved destruction date, it keeps its public record status and is subject to public records requests until it is destroyed.⁹²¹

In crafting proposed records retention schedules, a public office must evaluate the length of time each type of record needs to be retained after it has been received or created by the office for administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes.⁹²² Consideration should also be given to whether a record has historical value, a factor that the State Archives at the Ohio History Connection will also consider when conducting its review. Local records commissions may consult with the State Archives at the Ohio History Connection when setting retention schedules.⁹²³ The DAS state records program also offers consulting services for state offices.⁹²⁴

b. Transient records

Transient records are records that contain information of short-term usefulness or value to the public office. Examples of transient records include voicemail messages, telephone message slips, post-it notes, and superseded drafts. Adopting a schedule for transient records allows a public office to dispose of these records once they are no longer of administrative value.⁹²⁵ Both the State Archives at the Ohio History Connection and the DAS state records programs have examples of adoptable retention schedules concerning transient records.⁹²⁶

c. Records disposition

It is important to document the destruction of records that have met their approved retention periods. Properly tracking disposal of records allows a public office to verify which records it still maintains and to defend itself against any allegation of improper destruction.

- If required per the applicable records retention schedule (RC-2 form), a local government records commission must submit, at least 15 days before disposing of public records, a Certificate of Records Disposal (RC-3 form) with the State Archives at the Ohio History Connection to allow the State Archives to select records of enduring historical value.⁹²⁷
- State agencies can document their records disposals on the RIMS system or in-house.⁹²⁸

3. Liability for unauthorized destruction, damage, or disposal of records

All records are considered the property of the public office and must be delivered by outgoing officials and employees to their successors in office.⁹²⁹ Improper removal, destruction, damage or other disposition of a record is a violation of R.C. 149.351(A).

a. Injunction and civil forfeiture

Ohio law allows “any person who is aggrieved by”⁹³⁰ the “removal, destruction, mutilation, transfer, or other damage to or disposition of a record,” or by the threat of such action, to file either or both of the following types of lawsuits in the appropriate common pleas court:

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- A civil action for an injunction to force the public office to comply with R.C. 149.351(A), as well as any reasonable attorney fees associated with the suit.⁹³¹
- A civil action to recover a forfeiture of \$1,000 for each violation of R.C. 149.351(A), not to exceed a total of \$10,000 (regardless of the number of violations), as well as reasonable attorney fees associated with the suit, not to exceed the forfeiture amount recovered.⁹³²

A person is not “aggrieved” unless he or she establishes, as a threshold matter, that he or she made an enforceable public records request for the records claimed to have been disposed of in violation of R.C. 149.351.⁹³³ Also, a person is not “aggrieved” by a violation of R.C. 149.351(A) if clear and convincing evidence shows that the request for a record was contrived as a pretext to create liability under the section.⁹³⁴ If pretext is so proven, the court may order the requester to pay reasonable attorney fees to the defendant(s).⁹³⁵

The court of common pleas of the county where the alleged R.C. 149.351(A) violation occurred is vested with exclusive jurisdiction to hear such a case.⁹³⁶ Any attempt to seek an injunction for a violation of R.C. 149.351(A) in another court (e.g., a court of appeals) through the vehicle of an original action (e.g., mandamus) will fail for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.⁹³⁷ A mandamus action alleging violation of R.C. 149.351(A) in a court of appeals is also improper where no action pursuant to R.C. 149.351(B) has been commenced.⁹³⁸

b. Limits on filing action for unauthorized destruction, damage, or disposal

A person has five years from the date of the alleged violation or threatened violation to file the above actions⁹³⁹ and has the burden of providing evidence that records were destroyed in violation of R.C. 149.351.⁹⁴⁰ When any person has recovered a forfeiture in a civil action under R.C. 149.351(B)(2), no other person may recover a forfeiture for that same record, regardless of the number of persons “aggrieved,” or the number of civil lawsuits filed.⁹⁴¹ Determining the number of “violations” depends on the nature of the records involved.⁹⁴²

c. Attorney fees

The aggrieved person may seek an award of reasonable attorney fees for either the injunctive action or an action for civil forfeiture.⁹⁴³ An award of attorney fees under R.C. 149.351 is discretionary,⁹⁴⁴ and the award of attorney fees for the forfeiture action may not exceed the forfeiture amount.⁹⁴⁵

4. Availability of records retention schedules

All public offices must maintain a copy of all current records retention schedules at a location readily available to the public.⁹⁴⁶

B. Records Management – Practical Pointers

1. Fundamentals

a. Create records retention schedules and follow them

Every record, public or not, that is kept by a public office must be covered by a records retention schedule. Without an applicable schedule dictating how long a record must be kept and when it can be destroyed, a public office must keep that record forever.⁹⁴⁷ Apart from the inherent long-term storage problems and associated costs this creates for a public office, the office is also responsible for continuing to maintain the record in such a way that it can be made available at any time if it is

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responsive to a public records request. Creating and following schedules for all records allows a public office to dispose of records once they are no longer necessary or valuable.

b. Content—not medium—determines how long to keep a record

Deciding how long to keep a record should be based on the *content* of the record, not on the medium on which it exists. Not all paper documents are “records” for purposes of the Public Records Act; similarly, not all documents transmitted via email are “records” that must be maintained. Instead, a public office must look at the *content* of the email or paper document to determine whether that record fits the definition of a “record” in R.C. 149.011, and then apply the proper retention schedule to it. Accordingly, to fulfill both its records management and public records responsibilities, a public office should categorize all the records it keeps – regardless of the *form* in which they exist-- based on content. Content categories are also known as “records series.” Records within a records series should be kept for as long as they have legal, administrative, fiscal, or historic value. Note that storing email records unsorted on a server does not satisfy records retention requirements. This is because proper retention requires that a public office be able to destroy records according to records series. When emails are not sorted by content into records series, a server cannot apply proper retention and destroy records according to their content.

c. Practical application

Creating and implementing a records management system might sound daunting. For most public offices, though, it is a matter of simple housekeeping. Many offices already have the scaffolding of existing records retention schedules in place, which may be improved in the manner outlined below.

2. Managing records

a. Conduct a records inventory

The purpose of an inventory is to identify and describe the types of records an office keeps. Existing records retention schedules are a good starting point for determining the types of records an office keeps. Retention schedules also allow a public office to identify records that are no longer kept or new types of records for which new schedules need to be created.

For larger offices, it is helpful to designate a staff member from each functional area of the office who knows the kinds of records his or her department creates and why, what the records document, and how and where they are kept.

b. Categorize records by record series

Records should be grouped according to record series. A record series is a group of similar records that are related because they are created, received, or used for, or result from the same purpose or activity. Record series descriptions should be broad enough to encompass all records of a particular type (“Itemized Phone Bills” rather than “FY20-FY21 Phone Bills” for instance), but not so broad that it fails to be instructive (such as “Finance Department emails”) or leaves the contents open to interpretation or “shoehorning.”

c. Decide how long to keep each records series

Retention periods are determined by assessing four values for each category of records:

- **Administrative Value:** A record maintains its administrative value for as long as it is useful and relevant to the execution of the activities that caused the record to be created.

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Administrative value is determined by how long the record is needed by the office to carry out – that is, to “administer” – its duties. Every record created by government entities should have administrative value, which can vary from being transient (a notice of change in meeting location) to long-term (personnel files).

- **Legal Value:** A record has legal value if it documents or protects the rights or obligations of citizens or the agency that created it, provides for defense in litigation, or demonstrates compliance with laws, statutes, and regulations. Examples include contracts, real estate records, retention schedules, and licenses.
- **Fiscal Value:** A record has fiscal value if it pertains to the receipt, transfer, payment, adjustment, or encumbrance of funds, or if it is required for an audit. Examples include payroll records and travel vouchers.
- **Historical Value:** A record has historical value if it contains significant information about people, places, or events. The State Archives suggests that historical documents be retained permanently. Examples include board or commission meeting minutes and annual reports.

Retention periods should be set to the highest of these values and should reflect how long the record *needs* to be kept, not how long it *can* be kept.

d. Dispose of records on schedule

Records retention schedules indicate how long a particular record series must be kept and when and how the office can dispose of them. Records kept past their retention period are still subject to public records requests and can be unwieldy and expensive to store and/or migrate as technology changes. As a practical matter, it is helpful to designate a records manager or records custodian to assist in crafting retention schedules, monitoring when records are due for disposal, and ensuring proper completion of disposal forms.

e. Review schedules regularly and revise, delete, or create new schedules as the law and the office’s operations change

Keep track of new record series that are created because of statutory and policy changes. Ohio law requires all records to be scheduled within one year after the date that they are created or received.⁹⁴⁸

C. Helpful Resources for Local Government Offices: Ohio History Connection/State Archives – Local Government Records Program

The Local Government Records Program of the State Archives provides records-related advice, forms, model retention manuals, and assistance to local governments to facilitate the identification and preservation of local government records with enduring historical value. Please direct inquiries and send forms to:

The Ohio History Connection/State Archives
Local Government Records Program
800 East 17th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43211
(614) 297-2553
localrecs@ohiohistory.org
<https://www.ohiohistory.org/research/local-government-records-program/>

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D. Helpful Resources for State Government Offices

1. Ohio Department of Administrative Services records management program

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services' State Records Administration can provide records management advice and assistance to state agencies, as well as provide training seminars by request. Information available on their website includes:

- Access to the Records Information Management System (RIMS) retention schedule database;
- RIMS User Manual;
- General Retention Schedules; and
- Records Inventory and Analysis template.

For more information, contact DAS at 614-502-7461, or visit the Records Management page of the DAS website:

<https://das.ohio.gov/home/policy-finder/filter-policy-finder>

2. The Ohio History Connection, State Archives

The State Archives can assist state agencies with the identification and preservation of records with enduring historical value. For more information or to schedule a records appraisal, visit <https://www.ohiohistory.org/research/archives-library/state-archives/> or contact the State Archives:

The Ohio History Connection/State Archives
800 East 17th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43211
(614) 297-2536
statearchives@ohiohistory.org

E. Helpful Resources for All Government Offices

1. Ohio Electronic Records Committee

Electronic records present unique challenges for archivists and records managers. As offices have shifted from paper-based recordkeeping to electronic recordkeeping, the issues surrounding the amount, management, and storage of records have significantly increased. As the number of electronic records multiplies, the need for leadership and policy in keeping and organizing them becomes even more urgent.

The goal of the Ohio Electronic Records Committee (OhioERC) is to draft guidelines for the creation, maintenance, long term preservation of, and access to electronic records created by Ohio's state and local governments. The OhioERC's website include resources on such topics like:

- Blockchain Technology;
- Databases as Public Records;
- Digital Document Imaging Guidelines;
- Electronic Records Management Guidelines;
- Hybrid Microfilm Guidelines;
- Information Governance;

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- Managing Email Records;
- Managing Social Media Records;
- Trustworthy Information Systems Handbook; and
- Topical Tip Sheets.

For more information and to learn about ongoing projects, visit the Ohio Electronic Records Committee website: <http://www.OhioERC.org>.

2. Statements on Maintaining Digitally Imaged Records Permanently

Ohio History Connection:

<https://www.ohiohistory.org/learn/archives-library/state-archives/local-government-records-program/electronic-records-resources/statement-on-maintaining-digitally-imaged-records->

Ohio County Archivists and Records Managers Association

https://www.ohiohistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CARMA_Statement_on_Permanent_Records_2013_12_17.pdf

F. Public Records Policy

A public office must create and adopt a policy for responding to public records requests. The Ohio Attorney General’s Office has developed a model public records policy, which may serve as a guide.⁹⁴⁹ The public records policy must be distributed to the records manager, records custodian, or the employee who otherwise has custody of the records of the office, and that employee must acknowledge receipt. In addition, a poster describing the policy must be posted in the public office in a conspicuous location, as well as in all branch offices.⁹⁵⁰ The public records policy must be included in the office’s policies and procedures manual, if one exists, and may be posted on the office’s website.⁹⁵¹ Compliance with these requirements will be audited by the Auditor of State in the course of a regular financial audit.⁹⁵²

A public records policy may limit the number of records that the office will transmit by United States mail or by any other delivery service to a particular requester to ten per month, unless the requester certifies in writing that the requested records and/or the information those records contain will not be used or forwarded for commercial purposes. For purposes of this division, “commercial” shall be narrowly construed and does not include reporting or gathering of news, reporting, or gathering of information to assist citizen oversight or understanding of the operation or activities of government, or non-profit educational research.⁹⁵³

However, a public records policy *may not* (1) limit the number of public records made available to a single person; (2) limit the number of records the public office will make available during a fixed period of time; or (3) establish a fixed period of time before the public office will respond to a request for inspection or copying of public records (unless that period is less than eight hours).⁹⁵⁴

G. Required Public Records Training for Elected Officials

To enhance their knowledge of their duties under the Public Records Act and Open Meetings Act, all local and statewide elected government officials or their designees must complete a three-hour training program during each term of elective office the official serves.⁹⁵⁵ An “elected official” is any “official elected to a local or statewide office.”⁹⁵⁶ A “future official” (“a person who has received a certificate of election to a local or statewide office but has not yet taken office”) may choose to satisfy

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this requirement before taking office.⁹⁵⁷ Neither “elected official” or “future official” includes “the chief justice or a justice of the supreme court, a judge of a court of appeals, court of common pleas, municipal court, or county court, or a clerk of any of those courts.”⁹⁵⁸ A “designee” may be the designee of the sole elected official in a public office, or of all the elected officials if the public office includes more than one elected official.⁹⁵⁹ Compliance with the training requirement is audited by the Auditor of State in the course of a regular financial audit.⁹⁶⁰

The training must be developed and certified by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office and conducted either by the Ohio Attorney General’s Office or an approved public or private entity with which the Attorney General’s Office contracts.⁹⁶¹ The training is free and open to any member of the public.⁹⁶²

The Attorney General’s Office certified training schedule can be viewed at: www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/Sunshine.

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Notes:

- ⁸⁸⁸ R.C. 149.43(B)(2).
⁸⁸⁹ R.C. 149.351(A).
⁸⁹⁰ R.C. 149.43(B)(2).
⁸⁹¹ R.C. 149.43(E)(2); R.C. 109.43(E).
⁸⁹² R.C. 149.43(E)(1); R.C. 109.43(B).
⁸⁹³ See Auditor of State Bulletin 2019-003 at <https://www.ohioauditor.gov/publications/bulletins/2019/2019-003.pdf>.
⁸⁹⁴ See Auditor of State StaRS Rating System at <https://ohioauditor.gov/open/starshtml>.
⁸⁹⁵ R.C. 149.43(B)(2).
⁸⁹⁶ *Rhodes v. New Philadelphia*, 129 Ohio St.3d 304, 2011-Ohio-3279, ¶ 14.
⁸⁹⁷ R.C. 149.351(A).
⁸⁹⁸ See Chapter One: A. “What are ‘Records?’” and Chapter Two: A. “Rights and Obligations of Public Records Requesters and Public Offices,” for discussion of “record” v. “non-record.”
⁸⁹⁹ R.C. 149.40.
⁹⁰⁰ R.C. 149.38.
⁹⁰¹ R.C. 149.42.
⁹⁰² R.C. 149.39.
⁹⁰³ R.C. 149.411.
⁹⁰⁴ R.C. 149.412.
⁹⁰⁵ R.C. 149.41.
⁹⁰⁶ R.C. 149.41.
⁹⁰⁷ R.C. 149.38, .381.
⁹⁰⁸ R.C. 149.38, .381.
⁹⁰⁹ R.C. 149.381(C).
⁹¹⁰ R.C. 149.33(A).
⁹¹¹ R.C. 149.332.
⁹¹² Instructions for how to adopt DAS general retention schedules are on page 8 of the RIMS User Manual, available at: <https://das.ohio.gov/static/buying-selling/state-printing-and-mail-services/records-management/RIMS%20Manual.pdf>.
⁹¹³ R.C. 149.331(C).
⁹¹⁴ Instructions for how to submit a retention schedule for approval are on page 10 of the RIMS User Manual, available at: <https://das.ohio.gov/static/buying-selling/state-printing-and-mail-services/records-management/RIMS%20Manual.pdf>.
⁹¹⁵ R.C. 149.333.
⁹¹⁶ R.C. 149.333.
⁹¹⁷ R.C. 149.33(B).
⁹¹⁸ R.C. 149.33.
⁹¹⁹ R.C. 149.351.
⁹²⁰ *Wagner v. Huron Cty. Bd. of Cty. Commrs.*, 6th Dist. No. H-12-008, 2013-Ohio-3961, ¶ 17 (a public office must dispose of records in accordance with then-existing retention schedule and cannot claim that it disposed of records based on a schedule implemented after disposal of requested records).
⁹²¹ *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Columbus*, 90 Ohio St.3d 39, 41 (2000).
⁹²² R.C. 149.34.
⁹²³ R.C. 149.31(A) (“The archives administration shall be headed by a trained archivist designated by the Ohio history connection and shall make its services available to county, municipal, township, school district, library, and special taxing district records commissions upon request.”).
⁹²⁴ R.C. 149.331(D).
⁹²⁵ *State ex rel. Glasgow v. Jones*, 119 Ohio St.3d 391, 2008-Ohio-4788, ¶ 24, n.1.
⁹²⁶ Suggested local government retention schedules can be found at <https://www.ohiohistory.org/research/local-government-records-program/local-retention-schedules-forms/#rc>. “General Schedules” for state government agencies can be found in the RIMS database found at <https://das.ohio.gov/buying-and-selling/state-printing-and-mail-services/records-management/records-management>.
⁹²⁷ R.C. 149.38(C)(3); R.C. 149.381 (B) and (D).
⁹²⁸ Instructions for how to submit a records disposal are on page 18 of the RIMS User Manual, available at: <https://das.ohio.gov/static/buying-selling/state-printing-and-mail-services/records-management/RIMS%20Manual.pdf>.
⁹²⁹ R.C. 149.351(A).
⁹³⁰ *Rhodes v. New Philadelphia*, 129 Ohio St.3d 304, 2011-Ohio-3279; *Walker v. Ohio State Univ. Bd. of Trustees*, 10th Dist. No. 09AP-748, 2010-Ohio-373, ¶ 22-27 (a person is “aggrieved by” a violation of R.C. 149.351(A) when (1) the person has a legal right to disclosure of a record of a public office, and (2) the disposal of the record, not permitted by law, allegedly infringes the right); see also *State ex rel. Verhovec v. Uhrichsville*, 5th Dist. No. 2014AP04 0013, 2014-Ohio-4848 (finding requester did not demonstrate actual interest in records).
⁹³¹ R.C. 149.351(B)(1).
⁹³² R.C. 149.351(B)(2).
⁹³³ *Rhodes v. New Philadelphia*, 129 Ohio St.3d 304, 2011-Ohio-3279, ¶ 16; *Arnold v. Columbus*, 10th Dist. No. 14AP-418, 2015-Ohio-4873, ¶ 71-72; *Walker v. Ohio State Univ. Bd. of Trustees*, 10th Dist. No. 09AP-748 2010-Ohio-373, ¶ 22-27; *State ex rel. Todd v. Canfield*, 7th Dist. No. 11 MA 209, 2014-Ohio-569, ¶ 22.
⁹³⁴ R.C. 149.351(C); *Rhodes v. New Philadelphia*, 129 Ohio St.3d 304, 2011-Ohio-3279; *Mentch v. Cuyahoga Cty. Pub. Lib. Bd.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 105963, 2018-Ohio-1398, ¶ 78 (requester was not aggrieved when she made request “with the goal of challenging and/or reversing [a public office’s decision], or in the alternative, to prove the nonexistence of the records”); *State ex rel. Verhovec v. Marietta*, 4th Dist. No. 12CA32, 2013-Ohio-5415, ¶ 48 (when evidence showed that requester’s intent was pecuniary, requester was not aggrieved and not entitled to civil forfeiture).
⁹³⁵ R.C. 149.351(C)(2).
⁹³⁶ R.C. 149.351(B).
⁹³⁷ *State ex rel. Crenshaw v. King*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 1111093, 2021-Ohio-4433, ¶ 7-12.
⁹³⁸ *State ex rel. Crenshaw v. King*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 1111093, 2021-Ohio-4433, ¶ 14-17.
⁹³⁹ R.C. 149.351(E).
⁹⁴⁰ *Snodgrass v. Mayfield Hts.*, 8th Dist. No. 990643, 2008-Ohio-5095, ¶ 18; *State ex rel. Doe v. Register*, 12th Dist. No. CA2008-08-081, 2009-Ohio-2448, ¶ 30.
⁹⁴¹ R.C. 149.351(D).

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⁹⁴² *Kish v. Akron*, 109 Ohio St.3d 162, 2006-Ohio-1244, ¶ 25-44; see also *Cwynar v. Jackson Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 178 Ohio App.3d 345, 2008-Ohio-5011 (5th Dist.).

⁹⁴³ R.C. 149.351(B)(1)-(2).

⁹⁴⁴ *Cwynar v. Jackson Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 178 Ohio App.3d 345, 2008-Ohio-5011, ¶ 56 (5th Dist.).

⁹⁴⁵ R.C. 149.351(B)(2).

⁹⁴⁶ R.C. 149.43(B)(2).

⁹⁴⁷ R.C. 149.33; 149.351. Within one year after their date of creation or receipt, a public office must schedule all records for disposition or retention in the manner prescribed by applicable law and procedures. R.C. 149.34.

⁹⁴⁸ R.C. 149.34(C).

⁹⁴⁹ R.C. 149.43(E)(2); R.C. 109.43(E). The Attorney General's Office Model Policy is available at:

⁹⁵⁰ <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Government-Entities/Model-Public-Records-Policy.aspx>.

⁹⁵¹ R.C. 149.43(E)(2).

⁹⁵² R.C. 109.43(G).

⁹⁵³ R.C. 149.43(B)(7)(a). In addition, a public office may adopt policies and procedures it will follow in transmitting copies by U.S. mail or other means of delivery or transmission, but adopting such policies and procedures is deemed to create an enforceable duty on the office to comply with them. R.C. 149.43(B)(7)(b).

⁹⁵⁴ R.C. 149.43(E)(2).

⁹⁵⁵ R.C. 109.43(B).

⁹⁵⁶ R.C. 109.43(A)(2).

⁹⁵⁷ R.C. 109.43(A)(3); R.C. 109.43(B).

⁹⁵⁸ R.C. 109.43(A)(2)-(3).

⁹⁵⁹ R.C. 109.43(A)(1). R.C. 109.43(A)(1) does not define "appropriate."

⁹⁶⁰ R.C. 109.43(G).

⁹⁶¹ R.C. 109.43(B)-(D).

⁹⁶² R.C. 109.43(C). While the Attorney General's Office may not charge a registration fee to attend the training programs it conducts, outside public or private entities that contract with the Attorney General's Office to conduct the training programs may charge a registration fee.

The Ohio Open Meetings Act

Overview of the Ohio Open Meetings Act

What is a “public body”?

- A “public body” is a decision-making body at any level of government.
 - A public body may include the committees or subcommittees of a public body, even if these committees do not make the final decisions of the public body.
-

What is a “meeting”?

- A “meeting” is (1) a prearranged gathering, (2) of a majority of the members of the public body, (3) who are discussing or deliberating public business.
 - A meeting does not have to be called a “meeting” for the OMA requirements to apply—if the three elements above are present, the OMA requirements apply even if the gathering is called a “work session,” “retreat,” etc.
-

What is “discussion” or “deliberation” of public business?

- “Discussion” is an exchange of words, comments, or ideas.
 - “Deliberation” is the weighing and examination of reasons for and against taking a course of action.
 - “Discussion” or “deliberation” does not generally include information-gathering, attending presentations, or isolated conversations between employees.
-

What are the duties of a public body if the OMA applies?

- A public body must give appropriate notice of its meetings.
 - For regular meetings, notice must include the time and place of the meeting. For all other meetings—special and emergency meetings—notice must include the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.
 - A public body must make all meetings open to the public at all times.
 - Secret ballots, whispering of public business, and serial meetings or discussions are all prohibited under the openness requirement.
 - A public body must keep and maintain meeting minutes.
 - Minutes must be (1) promptly prepared, (2) filed, (3) maintained, and (4) open to the public. Meeting minutes do not need to be verbatim transcripts but must have enough detail to allow the public to understand and appreciate the rationale behind a public body’s decisions.
-

What are the requirements for an “executive session”?

- Proper procedure must be followed to move into an executive session, including a motion, second, and roll call vote in open session.
 - Discussion in an executive session must be limited to one of the proper topics listed in the OMA.
-

The Ohio Open Meetings Act

The Ohio Open Meetings Act

The Open Meetings Act requires public bodies in Ohio to take official action and conduct all deliberations of official business only in open meetings where the public may attend and observe. Public bodies must provide advance notice to the public indicating when and where each meeting will take place and, in the case of special meetings, the specific topics that the public body will discuss. The public body must take full and accurate minutes of all meetings and make these minutes available to the public, except in the case of permissible executive sessions.

Executive sessions are closed-door sessions convened by a public body, after a roll call vote, and attended by only the members of the public body and persons they invite. A public body may hold an executive session only for a few specific purposes, which are listed in the law. Further, no vote or other decision-making on the matter(s) discussed may take place during the executive session.

The Open Meetings Act is a “self-help” statute. This means that a person who believes that the Act has been violated must independently pursue a remedy, rather than asking a public official (such as the Ohio Attorney General) to initiate action on his or her behalf. If any person believes that a public body has violated the Open Meetings Act, that person may file an action in a common pleas court to compel the public body to obey the Act. If the court issues an injunction, the public body must correct its actions and pay court costs, a fine of \$500, and reasonable attorney fees subject to possible reduction by the court. If the court does not issue an injunction, and the court finds the lawsuit was frivolous, it may order the person who filed the suit to pay the public body’s court costs and reasonable attorney fees. Any formal action of a public body that did not take place in an open meeting, that resulted from deliberations in a meeting improperly closed to the public, or that was adopted at a meeting not properly noticed to the public is invalid. A member of a public body who violates an injunction imposed for a violation of the Open Meetings Act may be subject to removal from office.

Like the Public Records Act, the Open Meetings Act is intended to be read broadly in favor of openness. However, while they share an underlying intent, the terms and definitions in the two laws are not interchangeable: the Public Records Act applies to the *records of public offices*; the Open Meetings Act addresses *meetings of public bodies*.

A Note about Case Law

When the Supreme Court of Ohio issues a decision interpreting a statute, that decision must be followed by all lower Ohio courts. Supreme Court decisions involving the Public Records Act are plentiful because a person may file a public records lawsuit at any level of the judicial system and often will choose to file in the court of appeals, or directly with the Supreme Court. By contrast, a lawsuit to enforce the Open Meetings Act must be filed in a county court of common pleas. While the losing party often appeals a court’s decision, common pleas appeals are not guaranteed to reach the Supreme Court, and rarely do. Consequently, the bulk of case law on the Open Meetings Act comes from courts of appeals, whose opinions are binding only on lower courts within their district, but they may be cited for the persuasive value of their reasoning in cases filed in other districts.

The Ohio Open Meetings Act

Chapter Eight: “Public Body” and “Meeting” Defined

VIII. Chapter Eight: “Public Body” and “Meeting” Defined

Only entities that meet the definition of “public body” are subject to the Open Meetings Act. The Open Meetings Act requires “public bodies” to conduct their business in “meetings” that are open to the public. A “meeting” is any prearranged gathering of a public body by a majority of its members to discuss public business.⁹⁶³

A. “Public Body”

1. Statutory definition – R.C. 121.22(B)(1)

The Open Meetings Act defines a “public body” as any of the following:

- a. Any board, commission, committee, council, or similar decision-making body of a state agency, institution, or authority, and any legislative authority or board, commission, committee, council, agency, authority, or similar decision-making body of any county, township, municipal corporation, school district, or other political subdivision or local public institution;⁹⁶⁴
- b. Any committee or subcommittee thereof;⁹⁶⁵ or
- c. A court⁹⁶⁶ of jurisdiction of a sanitary district organized wholly for the purpose of providing a water supply for domestic, municipal, and public use when meeting for the purpose of the appointment, removal, or reappointment of a member of the board of directors of such a district or for any other matter related to such a district other than litigation involving the district.⁹⁶⁷

“Public body” under the Open Meetings Act has a different meaning and application than “public office” under the Public Records Act. An entity that is a “public body” that must comply with the Open Meetings Act may not also be a “public office” that must comply with the Public Records Act.⁹⁶⁸

2. Identifying public bodies

The term “public body” applies to many different decision-making bodies at the state and local level. A statute may specifically identify an entity as a “public body” or it may state that an entity is not subject to the Open Meetings Act. Otherwise, courts will apply several factors to determine what constitutes a “public body,” including:

- The way the entity was created;⁹⁶⁹
- The name or official title of the entity;⁹⁷⁰
- The membership composition of the entity;⁹⁷¹
- Whether the entity engages in decision-making;⁹⁷² and
- Who the entity advises or to whom it reports.⁹⁷³

3. Applying the definition of “public body”

Using the above factors, some courts of appeals have held that the following entities are public bodies:

- A selection committee established on a temporary basis by a state agency for the purpose of evaluating responses to a request for proposals and making a recommendation to a commission.⁹⁷⁴

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- An urban design review board that provided advice and recommendations to a city manager and city council about land development.⁹⁷⁵
- A board of hospital governors of a joint township district hospital.⁹⁷⁶
- A citizens’ advisory committee of a county children services board.⁹⁷⁷
- A board of directors of a county agricultural society.⁹⁷⁸

Courts have found that the Open Meetings Act does not apply to individual public *officials* (as opposed to public *bodies*) or to meetings held by individual officials.⁹⁷⁹ Moreover, if an individual public official creates a group solely pursuant to his or her executive authority or as a delegation of that authority, the Open Meetings Act probably does not apply to the group’s gatherings.⁹⁸⁰

However, at least one court determined that a selection committee whose members were appointed by the chair of a public body, not by formal action of the body, is nevertheless a public body and subject to the Open Meetings Act.⁹⁸¹

4. When the Open Meetings Act applies to private bodies

Some private entities are considered “public bodies” for purposes of the Open Meetings Act when they are organized pursuant to state statute and are statutorily authorized to receive and expend government funds for a governmental purpose. For example, one court held that an economic opportunity planning association is a public body within the meaning of the Act based on the following factors: (1) its designation by the Ohio Department of Development as a community action organization pursuant to statute; (2) its responsibility for spending substantial sums of public funds in the operation of programs for the public welfare; and (3) its obligation to comply with state statutory provisions in order to keep its status as a community action organization.⁹⁸²

5. Public bodies/officials that are NEVER subject to the Open Meetings Act:

- The Ohio General Assembly;⁹⁸³
- Grand juries;⁹⁸⁴
- An audit conference conducted by the State Auditor or independent certified public accountants with officials of the public office that is the subject of the audit;⁹⁸⁵
- The Organized Crime Investigations Commission;⁹⁸⁶
- County child fatality review boards or state-level reviews of deaths of children;⁹⁸⁷
- The board of directors of JobsOhio Corp., or any committee thereof, and the board of directors of any subsidiary of JobsOhio Corp., or any committee thereof;⁹⁸⁸ and
- An audit conference conducted by the audit staff of the Department of Job and Family Services with officials of the public office that is the subject of that audit under R.C. 5101.37.⁹⁸⁹
- Fatality- or mortality-review boards established under R.C. 3738.01, 3707.071, 307.631, 307.641, and 307.651.⁹⁹⁰

6. Public bodies that are SOMETIMES subject to the Open Meetings Act:

a. Public bodies meeting for specific purposes

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Some public bodies are not subject to the Open Meetings Act when they meet for particular purposes, including:

- The Adult Parole Authority, when its hearings are conducted at a correctional institution for the sole purpose of interviewing inmates to determine pardon or parole;⁹⁹¹
- The State Medical Board,⁹⁹² the State Board of Nursing,⁹⁹³ the State Chiropractic Board⁹⁹⁴ when determining whether to suspend a license or certificate without a prior hearing;⁹⁹⁵
- The State Board of Pharmacy when determining whether to suspend a license, certification, or registration without a prior hearing (including during meetings conducted by telephone conference);⁹⁹⁶ or when determining whether to restrict a person from obtaining further information from the drug database without a hearing;⁹⁹⁷
- The Emergency Response Commission’s executive committee when meeting to determine whether to issue an enforcement order or to decide whether to bring an enforcement action;⁹⁹⁸ and
- The Occupational Therapy Section, Physical Therapy Section, and Athletic Trainers Section of the Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Athletic Trainers Board when determining whether to suspend a practitioner’s license without a hearing.⁹⁹⁹
- Nonprofit corporations that created a special improvement district under R.C. 1710 when the corporation is not discussing business relating the purpose for which the improvement district was created.¹⁰⁰⁰

b. Public bodies handling specific business

When meeting to consider “whether to grant assistance for purposes of community or economic development,” certain public bodies may conduct meetings that are not open to the public. Specifically, the Controlling Board, the Tax Credit Authority, and the Minority Development Financing Advisory Board may close their meetings by *unanimous* vote of the members present to protect the interest of the applicant or the possible investment of public funds.¹⁰⁰¹

The meetings of these three bodies may only be closed “during consideration of the following information confidentially received ... from the applicant:”

- Marketing plans;
- Specific business strategy;
- Production techniques and trade secrets;
- Financial projections; and
- Personal financial statements of the applicant or the applicant’s immediate family, including, but not limited to, tax records or other similar information not open to public inspection.¹⁰⁰²

In addition, the board of directors of a community improvement corporation, when acting as an agent of a political subdivision, may close a meeting by *majority* vote of all members present during consideration of non-public record information set out in R.C. 1724.11(A).¹⁰⁰³

B. “Meeting”

1. Definition

The Open Meetings Act requires members of a public body to take official action, conduct deliberations, and discuss the public business in an open meeting, unless the subject matter is

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specifically exempted by law.¹⁰⁰⁴ The Act defines a “meeting” as: (1) a prearranged gathering of (2) a majority of the members of a public body (3) for the purpose of discussing public business.¹⁰⁰⁵

a. Prearranged

The Open Meetings Act governs prearranged discussions,¹⁰⁰⁶ but it does not prohibit unplanned encounters between members of public bodies, such as hallway discussions. One court held that neither an unsolicited and unexpected email sent from one board member to other board members, nor a spontaneous one-on-one telephone conversation between two members of a five-member board was a prearranged meeting.¹⁰⁰⁷ In another case, the court held that two members of a three-member commission did not have a prearranged meeting when one member came to the office of another and had an impromptu discussion.¹⁰⁰⁸ However, the “prearranged” element does not require the parties to participate at the same time, and a series of emails exchanged among a majority of board members can constitute a “prearranged gathering” even when the emails started with one board member sending an unsolicited email to other board members.¹⁰⁰⁹

b. Majority of members

The requirement that a gathering of a majority of the members of a public body constitutes a meeting applies to the public body as a whole and also to the separate memberships of all committees and subcommittees of that body.¹⁰¹⁰ For example, if a council is comprised of seven members, four constitute a majority in determining whether the council as a whole is conducting a “meeting.” If the council appoints a three-member finance committee, two of those members would constitute a majority of the finance committee.

i. Attending in person

A member of a public body must be present in person at a meeting in order to be considered present, vote, or be counted as part of a quorum.¹⁰¹¹ A small number of public bodies have statutory authority to conduct meetings via teleconference, videoconference, or other remote means.¹⁰¹² In the absence of specific statutory authority, however, public bodies may not conduct a meeting via electronic or telephonic conferencing.

ii. Serial “meetings”

Unless two members constitute a majority, isolated one-on-one conversations between individual members of a public body regarding its business, either in person or by telephone, do not violate the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰¹³ However, a public body may not “circumvent the requirements of the statute by setting up back-to-back meetings of fewer than a majority of its members, with the same topics of public business discussed at each.”¹⁰¹⁴ Such conversations may be considered multiple parts of the same, improperly private, “meeting.”¹⁰¹⁵ Serial meetings may also occur over the telephone or through electronic communications, like email.¹⁰¹⁶

c. Discussing public business

With narrow exceptions, the Open Meetings Act requires the members of a public body to discuss and deliberate on official business only in open meetings.¹⁰¹⁷ “Discussion” is the exchange of words, comments, or ideas by the members of a public body.¹⁰¹⁸ “Deliberation” means the act of weighing and examining reasons for and against an action.¹⁰¹⁹ One court described “deliberation” as a thorough discussion of all factors involved, a careful weighing of positive and negative factors, and a cautious consideration of the ramifications of the proposal, while gradually arriving at a decision.¹⁰²⁰ Another court described the term as involving “a decisional analysis, i.e., an exchange of views on the facts in an attempt to reach a decision.”¹⁰²¹ Discussions of public business may also be conducted over any other media, such as the telephone, video conference, email, text, or tweet.¹⁰²² In other words, just because a discussion did not occur in-person does not mean it is exempt from the requirements of the Open Meetings Act.

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In evaluating whether a gathering of public officials constituted a “meeting,” one court opined that the Open Meetings Act “is intended to apply to those situations where there has been actual formal action taken; to wit, formal *deliberations* concerning the public business.”¹⁰²³ Under this analysis, courts have determined that gatherings strictly of an investigative and information-seeking nature that do not involve actual discussion or deliberation of public business are not “meetings” for purposes of the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰²⁴ More importantly, the Supreme Court of Ohio has not ruled on whether “investigative and informational” gatherings are or are not “meetings.” Consequently, public bodies should seek guidance from their legal counsel about how such gatherings are viewed by the court of appeals in their district, before convening this kind of private gathering as something other than a regular or special meeting.

Some courts have distinguished “discussions” or “deliberations” that must take place in public from other exchanges among a majority of members at a prearranged gathering. These courts have opined that the following are not “meetings” subject to the Open Meetings Act:

- Question-and-answer session between board members, the public body’s legal counsel, and others who were not public officials, was not a meeting because a majority of the board members did not engage in discussion or deliberation of public business *with one another*,¹⁰²⁵
- Conversations among staff members employed by a city council;¹⁰²⁶
- A presentation to a public body by its legal counsel when the public body receives legal advice,¹⁰²⁷ or when a public body requests a legal opinion from its counsel,¹⁰²⁸ and
- A press conference.¹⁰²⁹

2. Applying the definition of “meeting”

If a gathering meets all three elements of the definition of a “meeting”—(1) a prearranged gathering of (2) a majority of the members of a public body (3) for the purpose of discussing public business—a court will consider it a “meeting” for the purposes of the Open Meetings Act. This is true regardless of whether the public body initiated the gathering itself or whether it was initiated by another entity. Further, if majorities of multiple public bodies attend one large meeting, a court may construe the gathering of each public body’s majority of members as separate “meetings” of each public body.¹⁰³⁰

a. Work sessions

A “meeting” by any other name is still a meeting. “Work retreats” or “workshops” are “meetings” when a public body discusses public business among a majority of the members of a public body at a prearranged time.¹⁰³¹ When conducting any meeting, the public body must comply with its obligations under the Open Meetings Act: openness, notice, and minutes.¹⁰³²

b. Quasi-judicial proceedings

Public bodies whose responsibilities include adjudicative duties, such as boards of tax appeals and state professional licensing boards, are considered “quasi-judicial.” The Supreme Court of Ohio has determined that public bodies conducting quasi-judicial hearings, “like all judicial bodies, [require] privacy to deliberate, i.e., to evaluate and resolve, the disputes.”¹⁰³³ Quasi-judicial proceedings and the deliberations of public bodies when acting in their quasi-judicial capacities are not “meetings” and are not subject to the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰³⁴ Accordingly, when a public body is acting in its quasi-judicial capacity, the public body does not have to vote publicly to adjourn for deliberations or to take action following those deliberations.¹⁰³⁵

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c. County political party central committees

The convening of a county political party central committee to conduct purely internal party affairs, unrelated to the committee’s duties of making appointments to vacated public offices, is not a “meeting” as defined by the Open Meetings Act. Thus, the Act does not apply to such a gathering.¹⁰³⁶

d. Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining meetings between public employers and employee organizations are private and are not subject to the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰³⁷

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Notes:

⁹⁶³ R.C. 121.22(B)(2).

⁹⁶⁴ R.C. 121.22(B)(1)(a).

⁹⁶⁵ R.C. 121.22(B)(1)(b); *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 58-59 (2001) (“R.C. 121.22(B)(1)(b) includes any committee or subcommittee of a legislative authority of a political subdivision, e.g., a village council, as a ‘public body’ for purposes of the Sunshine Law, so that the council’s personnel and finance committees constitute public bodies in that context.”); *State ex rel. Maynard v. Medina Cty. Facilities Taskforce Subcomm.*, 9th Dist. Medina No. 19VA0083-M, 2020-Ohio-5561, ¶ 18-20 (finding that subcommittee can be sued for Open Meetings Act violation even though it is not a “decision-making body” and does not have “decision-making authority”).

⁹⁶⁶ Except for sanitation courts, the definition of “public body” does not include courts. See *Walker v. Muskingum Watershed Conservancy Dist.*, 5th Dist. Tuscarawas No. 2007 AP 01 0005, 2008-Ohio-4060, ¶ 27. Note that R.C. 121.22(G) prohibits executive sessions for sanitation courts.

⁹⁶⁷ R.C. 121.22(B)(1)(c).

⁹⁶⁸ “[The Supreme Court of Ohio has] never expressly held that once an entity qualifies as a public body for purposes of R.C. 121.22, it is also a public office for purposes of R.C. 149.011(A) and 149.43 so as to make all of its nonexempt records subject to disclosure. In fact, R.C. 121.22 suggests otherwise because it contains separate definitions for ‘public body,’ R.C. 121.22(B)(1), and ‘public office,’ R.C. 121.22(B)(4), which provides that ‘[p]ublic office’ has the same meaning as in section 149.011 of the Revised Code.’ Had the General Assembly intended that a ‘public body’ for the purposes of R.C. 121.22 be considered a ‘public office’ for purposes of R.C. 149.011(A) and 149.43, it would have so provided.” *State ex rel. Am. Civ. Liberties Union of Ohio, Inc. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. Comms.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 38.

⁹⁶⁹ *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 472 (10th Dist. 2001) (selection committee established by Ohio Rail Development Commission was a “public body” under the Open Meetings Act because it made decisions and advised the commission; that the selection committee was created without formal action was immaterial); *State ex rel. Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-210369, 2022-Ohio-1109 (land-use planning committee created by a township’s board of trustees was a “public body” under the Open Meetings Act because the committee’s members were appointed to make recommendations for a land-use plan that the trustees had the power to approve; the committee’s lack of formal decision-making power was not dispositive); but see *State ex rel. Am. Civ. Liberties Union of Ohio, Inc. v. Cuyahoga Cty. Bd. Comms.*, 128 Ohio St.3d 256, 2011-Ohio-625, ¶ 44 (groups formed by private entities to provide community input, not established by governmental entity, and to which no government duties or authority have been delegated, were not “public bodies”); *State ex rel. Massie v. Lake Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2020-L-087, 2021-Ohio-786, ¶ 41 (county visitor’s bureau, a non-profit corporation, was not a public body because it was not established by statute and its authority was independent from any government entity).

⁹⁷⁰ *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 472 (10th Dist. 2001) (in finding that a selection committee was a “public body,” it was relevant that the entity was called a “committee,” a term included in the definition of a “public body” in R.C. 121.22); *Stegall v. Joint Twp. Dist. Mem. Hosp.*, 20 Ohio App.3d 100, 103 (3d Dist. 1985) (finding relevant that the name of the entity is one of the public body titles listed in R.C. 121.22(B)(1), i.e., Board of Hospital Governors).

⁹⁷¹ *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 472 (10th Dist. 2001) (finding relevant that commissioners of the parent Ohio Rail Development Commission comprised a majority of a selection committee’s membership).

⁹⁷² *Thomas v. White*, 85 Ohio App.3d 410, 412 (9th Dist. 1992) (tasks such as making recommendations and advising involve decision-making); *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati*, 145 Ohio App.3d 335, 339 (1st Dist. 2001) (whether urban design review board, comprised of a group of architectural consultants for the city, had ultimate authority to decide matters was not controlling because the board actually made decisions in the process of formulating its advice); *State ex rel. Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-210369, 2022-Ohio-1109 (land-use planning committee’s lack of formal decision-making power was not dispositive because it made recommendations and advised other public bodies, which necessitated making decisions); *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 472 (10th Dist. 2001) (selection committee made decisions in its role of reviewing and evaluating proposals and making a recommendation to the Ohio Rail Development Commission).

⁹⁷³ *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati*, 145 Ohio App.3d 335, 339 (1st Dist. 2001) (finding an urban design review board that advised not only the city manager, but also the city council, to be a public body).

⁹⁷⁴ *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 472 (10th Dist. 2001) (finding relevant that the group was called a “committee,” a term included in the definition of a “public body” in R.C. 121.22; that a majority of the selection committee’s members were commissioners of the commission itself; that the selection committee made decisions in its role of reviewing and evaluating proposals and making a recommendation to the Ohio Rail Development Commission (a public body); that the selection committee was established by the committee without formal action is immaterial).

⁹⁷⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati*, 145 Ohio App.3d 335, 339 (1st Dist. 2001) (whether an urban design review board, comprised of a group of architectural consultants for the city, had ultimate authority to decide matters was not controlling, as the board actually made decisions in the process of formulating its advice; the board advised not only the city manager, but also the city council, a public body); *State ex rel. Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-210369, 2022-Ohio-1109 (a land-use planning committee created by a township’s board of trustees was a “public body” even though it had no formal decision-making power, because it was a subcommittee to which the trustees referred business- and because it made recommendations and advised other public bodies, which necessitated making decisions).

⁹⁷⁶ *Stegall v. Joint Twp. Dist. Mem. Hosp.*, 20 Ohio App.3d 100, 102-03 (3d Dist. 1985) (the Board of Governors of a joint township hospital fell within the definition of “public body” because this definition includes “boards”; the board made decisions essential to the construction and equipping of a general hospital; and the board was of a “township” or of a “local public institution” because it existed by virtue of authority granted by the legislature for the creation of joint township hospital facilities).

⁹⁷⁷ *Thomas v. White*, 85 Ohio App.3d 410, 412 (9th Dist. 1992) (committee was a public body because the subject matter of the committee’s operations is the public business, each of its duties involves decisions as to what will be done, and the committee by law elects a chairman who serves as an *ex officio* voting member of the children services board, which involves decision-making).

⁹⁷⁸ 1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 078.

⁹⁷⁹ *Smith v. Cleveland*, 94 Ohio App.3d 780, 784-785 (8th Dist. 1994) (city safety director is not a public body and may conduct disciplinary hearings without complying with the Open Meetings Act).

⁹⁸⁰ *Beacon Journal Publishing Co. v. Akron*, 3 Ohio St.2d 191 (1965) (boards, commissions, committees, etc., created by executive order of the mayor and chief administrator without the advice and consent of city council were not subject to the Open Meetings Act); *eFunds v. Ohio Dept. of Job & Family Serv.*, Franklin C.P. No. 05CVH09-10276 (2006) (an “evaluation committee” of government employees under the authority of a state agency administrator is not a public body); 1994 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 096 (when a committee of private citizens and various public officers or employees is established solely pursuant to the executive authority of the administrator of a general health district for the purpose of providing advice pertaining to the administration of a grant, and establishment of the committee is not required or authorized by the grant or board action, such a committee is not a public body for purposes of the Open Meetings Act and is not subject to the requirements of the Act).

⁹⁸¹ *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460 (10th Dist. 2001).

⁹⁸² *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Economic Opportunity Planning Assn. of Greater Toledo*, 61 Ohio Misc.2d 631, 640 (C.P. 1990) (an economic opportunity planning association was a public body because it was designed as a community action agency under the Open Meetings Act).

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⁹⁸³ While the Open Meetings Act does not apply to the General Assembly as a whole, legislative committees are required to follow the guidelines set forth in the General Assembly’s own open meetings law ([R.C. 101.15](#)), which requires committee meetings to be open to the public and that minutes of those meetings be made available for public inspection. Like the Open Meetings Act, the legislature’s open meetings law includes some exemptions. For example, the law does not apply to meetings of the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee, other than those meetings specified in the law ([R.C. 101.15\(F\)\(1\)](#)), or to meetings of a political party caucus ([R.C. 101.15\(F\)\(2\)](#)).

⁹⁸⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(1\)](#).

⁹⁸⁵ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(2\)](#).

⁹⁸⁶ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(4\)](#).

⁹⁸⁷ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(5\)](#).

⁹⁸⁸ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(11\)](#).

⁹⁸⁹ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(12\)](#).

⁹⁹⁰ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(16\)-\(19\)](#), (21).

⁹⁹¹ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(3\)](#).

⁹⁹² [R.C. 4730.25\(G\)](#); [R.C. 4731.22\(G\)](#).

⁹⁹³ [R.C. 4723.281\(B\)](#).

⁹⁹⁴ [R.C. 4734.37](#).

⁹⁹⁵ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(6\)-\(7\)](#), (9).

⁹⁹⁶ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(8\)\(a\)](#); [R.C. 4729.16\(D\)](#); [R.C. 3796.14\(B\)](#); [R.C. 4752.09\(C\)](#); [R.C. 3719.121\(B\)](#).

⁹⁹⁷ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(8\)\(b\)](#); [R.C. 4729.75](#); [R.C. 4729.86\(C\)](#).

⁹⁹⁸ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(10\)](#).

⁹⁹⁹ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(13\)-\(15\)](#); [R.C. 4755.11](#); [R.C. 4755.47](#); [R.C. 4755.64](#).

¹⁰⁰⁰ [R.C. 121.22\(D\)\(20\)](#).

¹⁰⁰¹ [R.C. 121.22\(E\)](#).

¹⁰⁰² [R.C. 121.22\(E\)\(1\)-\(5\)](#).

¹⁰⁰³ [R.C. 1724.11\(B\)\(1\)](#) (providing that the board, committee, or subcommittee shall consider no other information during the closed session).

¹⁰⁰⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(A\)](#), (B)(2), (C).

¹⁰⁰⁵ [R.C. 121.22\(B\)\(2\)](#).

¹⁰⁰⁶ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Cincinnati*, 76 Ohio St.3d 540, 544 (1996) (back-to-back, prearranged discussions of city council members constitute a “majority,” but clarifying that the Open Meetings Act does not prohibit impromptu meetings between council members or prearranged member-to-member discussion).

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Haverkos v. Northwest Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton Nos. C-040578, C-040589, 2005-Ohio-3489, ¶ 7.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2023-P-0044, 2024-Ohio-146, ¶ 32-33.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *White v. King*, 147 Ohio St.3d 74, 2016-Ohio-2770, ¶ 15-20.

¹⁰¹⁰ *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 58-59 (2001).

¹⁰¹¹ [R.C. 121.22\(C\)](#).

¹⁰¹² The following are examples of public bodies that have statutory authority to conduct meetings via teleconference, videoconference, or other remote means: [R.C. 308.051](#) (board of trustees of a regional airport authority); [R.C. 339.02](#) (board of county hospital trustees); [R.C. 715.693](#) (board of directors of joint economic development zones); [R.C. 940.39\(B\)](#) (board of supervisors of a soil and water conservation district); [R.C. 3307.091](#) (State Teachers Retirement Board); [R.C. 3316.05\(K\)](#) (school district financial planning and supervision commission); [R.C. 3345.82](#) (board of trustees of a state institution of higher education); [R.C. 4517.35](#) (motor vehicle dealers board); [R.C. 4582.60\(A\)](#) (board of directors of a port authority); [R.C. 5123.35\(F\)](#) (developmental disabilities council); [R.C. 5126.0223](#) (county board of developmental disabilities); [R.C. 6133.041\(A\)](#) (joint board of county commissioners of joint county ditches). NOTE: this list is not exhaustive, consult with legal counsel or conduct independent legal research to determine if a specific public body has statutory authority to meet via remote means.

¹⁰¹³ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Cincinnati*, 76 Ohio St.3d 540, 544 (1996) (“[The Open Meetings Act] does not prohibit member-to-member prearranged discussions.”); *Haverkos v. Northwest Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton Nos. C-040578, C-040589, 2005-Ohio-3489, ¶ 11 (a spontaneous telephone call from one board member to another to discuss election politics, not school board business, did not violate the Open Meetings Act).

¹⁰¹⁴ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Cincinnati*, 76 Ohio St.3d 540, 543 (1996) (city council members had a “meeting” for purposes of the Open Meetings Act when it held back-to-back, prearranged discussions of public business).

¹⁰¹⁵ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Post v. Cincinnati*, 76 Ohio St.3d 540, 542-44 (1996) (noting the purpose of the Open Meetings Act is to prevent a game of “musical chairs” in which elected officials contrive to meet secretly to deliberate on public issues without accountability to the public); *State ex rel. Floyd v. Rock Hill Local School Bd. of Edn.*, 4th Dist. Lawrence No. 1862, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 471, *4, 13-16 (Feb. 10, 1988) (school board president improperly discussed and deliberated dismissal of principal with other board members in multiple one-on-one conversations, and came to next meeting with letter of non-renewal ready for superintendent to deliver to principal, which the board voted to approve without discussion); but see *Wilkins v. Harrisburg*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 12AP-1046, 2013-Ohio-2751 (two presentations were not serial meetings when the gatherings were separated by two months, the presentations were discussed at regularly scheduled meetings, and a regularly scheduled meeting was held between the two presentations).

¹⁰¹⁶ *White v. King*, 147 Ohio St.3d 74, 2016-Ohio-2770, ¶ 16-18 (“Allowing public bodies to avoid the requirements of the Open Meetings Act by discussing public business via serial electronic communications subverts the purpose of the act.”).

¹⁰¹⁷ [R.C. 121.22\(A\)](#), (B)(2), (C).

¹⁰¹⁸ *DeVere v. Miami Univ. Bd. of Trustees*, 12th Dist. Butler No. CA85-05-065, 1986 Ohio App. LEXIS 7171, *10 (June 10, 1986) (no discussion of public business when board president simply conveyed information to the board and there was no exchange of words, comments, or ideas).

¹⁰¹⁹ *State ex rel. Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-210369, 2022-Ohio-1109, ¶ 39.

¹⁰²⁰ *State ex rel. Ames v. Brimfield Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0018, 2019-Ohio-5311, ¶ 13-15.

¹⁰²¹ *Piekutowski v. S. Cent. Ohio Edn. Serv. Ctr. Governing Bd.*, 161 Ohio App.3d 372, 2005-Ohio-2868, ¶ 14 (4th Dist.).

¹⁰²² *White v. King*, 147 Ohio St.3d 74, 2016-Ohio-2770, ¶ 16; *State ex rel. Mohr v. Colerain Twp.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-210369, 2022-Ohio-1109, ¶ 39.

¹⁰²³ *Holeski v. Lawrence*, 85 Ohio App.3d 824, 829 (11th Dist. 1993).

¹⁰²⁴ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2017-P-0093, 2018-Ohio-2888, ¶ 25 (no deliberations occurred when the evidence established that the public body convened for informational purposes, and the members did not “exchange[] any ideas amongst one another”); *Piekutowski v. S. Cent. Ohio Edn. Serv. Ctr. Governing Bd.*, 161 Ohio App.3d 372, 2005-Ohio-2868, ¶ 14-18 (4th Dist.) (a board may gather information on proposed school district in private, but it cannot deliberate privately in the absence of specifically authorized purposes); *State ex rel. Massie v. Lake County Bd. Of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2020-L-087, 2021-Ohio-786, ¶ 27 (evidence supported finding that commission members’ gathering was for information-seeking and was not a “meeting” under the Open Meetings Act); *State ex rel. Kovoor v. Trumbull Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2022-TR-0101, 2023-Ohio-2256, ¶ 33 (board’s request for a legal opinion from the prosecutor constituted information-gathering).

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Chapter Eight: “Public Body” and “Meeting” Defined

¹⁰²⁵ *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati Bd. of Edn.*, 192 Ohio App.3d 566, 2011-Ohio-703 (1st Dist.) (a non-public information-gathering investigative session with legal counsel was not a “meeting” under the Open Meetings Act because board members did not deliberate or discuss public business).

¹⁰²⁶ *Kandell v. City Council of Kent*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 90-P-2255, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 3640 (Aug. 2, 1991); see also *State ex rel. Bd. of Edn. for Fairview Park School Dist. v. Bd. of Edn. for Rocky River School Dist.*, 40 Ohio St.3d 136, 140 (1988) (employee’s discussions with a superintendent did not amount to secret deliberations within the meaning of R.C. 121.22(H)).

¹⁰²⁷ *Cincinnati Enquirer v. Cincinnati Bd. of Edn.*, 192 Ohio App.3d 566, 2011-Ohio-703 (1st Dist.).

¹⁰²⁸ *State ex rel. Kovoor v. Trumbull Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2022-TR-0101, 2023-Ohio-2256, ¶ 29-33.

¹⁰²⁹ *Holeski v. Lawrence*, 85 Ohio App.3d 824 (11th Dist. 1993).

¹⁰³⁰ *State ex rel. Fairfield Leader v. Ricketts*, 56 Ohio St.3d 97 (1990); *State ex rel. Wengert v. Baughman Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 9th Dist. Wayne No. 13CA0048, 2014-Ohio-4749.

¹⁰³¹ *State ex rel. Singh v. Schoenfeld*, 10th Dist. Franklin Nos. 92AP-188, 92AP-193, 1993 Ohio App. LEXIS 2409 (May 4, 1993).

¹⁰³² *State ex rel. Fairfield Leader v. Ricketts*, 56 Ohio St.3d 97 (1990).

¹⁰³³ *TBC Westlake v. Hamilton Cty. Bd. of Revision*, 81 Ohio St.3d 58, 62 (1998).

¹⁰³⁴ *TBC Westlake v. Hamilton Cty. Bd. of Revision*, 81 Ohio St.3d 58, 62 (1998) (“[T]he Sunshine Law does not apply to adjudications of disputes in quasi-judicial proceedings, such as the [Board of Tax Appeals].”); *State ex rel. Ross v. Crawford Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 125 Ohio St.3d 438, 445, 2010-Ohio-2167, ¶ 32 (board of elections proceeding determining whether to remove a candidate from the ballot was a quasi-judicial proceeding and the Open Meetings Act did not apply); *Pennell v. Brown Twp.*, 5th Dist. Delaware No. 15 CAH 09 0074, 2016-Ohio-2652, ¶ 34-37 (board of zoning appeals hearing was quasi-judicial and Open Meetings Act did not apply); *Wightman v. Ohio Real Estate Comm.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 16AP-466, 2017-Ohio-756, ¶ 26 (state professional licensing board was quasi-judicial and Open Meetings Act did not apply).

¹⁰³⁵ *State ex rel. Ross v. Crawford Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 125 Ohio St.3d 438, 2010-Ohio-2167 (because the Open Meetings Act did not apply to the elections board’s quasi-judicial proceeding, there was no violation in failing to publicly vote on whether to adjourn the public hearing to deliberate, and failing to publicly vote on the matters at issue following deliberations); *In re Application for Additional Use of Property v. Allen Twp. Zoning Bd. of Appeals*, 6th Dist. Ottawa No. OT-12-008, 2013-Ohio-722, ¶ 15 (board of zoning appeals was acting in its quasi-judicial capacity in reviewing applications for conditional use); *Beachland Ents., Inc. v. Cleveland Bd. of Rev.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 99770, 2013-Ohio-5585, ¶ 44-46 (board of review was acting in quasi-judicial capacity in adjudicating tax dispute between the city commissioner of assessments and licenses and the taxpayer); *Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow v. Ohio State Bd. of Edn.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 17AP-510, 2018-Ohio-716, ¶ 20-28 (consideration of hearing officer’s recommendation was a quasi-judicial function); *Howard v. Ohio State Racing Comm.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 18AP-349, 2019-Ohio-4013, ¶ 46 (proceedings before Ohio State Racing Commission were quasi-judicial in nature and Commission not obligated to deliberate in public); *Nosse v. Kirtland*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2022-L-032, 2022-Ohio-4161, ¶ 28 (public hearing on police chief’s removal was a quasi-judicial proceeding).

¹⁰³⁶ *1980 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 083*; see also *Jones v. Geauga Cty. Republican Party Cent. Commt.*, 11th Dist. Geauga No. 2016-G-0056, 2017-Ohio-2930, ¶ 35 (upholding the trial court’s dismissal of the case because the meeting at issue concerned purely internal affairs, not public business, and was therefore not subject to the Open Meetings Act); *State ex rel. Ames v. Geauga Cty. Republican Cent. & Executive Commts.*, 11th Dist. Geauga No. 2021-G-0004, 2021-Ohio-2888 (the Open Meetings Act does not apply to meeting of county political party central committee when purpose of the meeting is to conduct internal party business).

¹⁰³⁷ *R.C. 4117.21*; see also *Springfield Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn. v. Ohio Assn. of Pub. School Emps.*, 106 Ohio App.3d 855, 869 (9th Dist. 1995) (R.C. 4117.21 manifests a legislative interest in protecting the privacy of the collective bargaining process); *Back v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 12th Dist. Butler No. CA2007-03-066, 2007-Ohio-4218, ¶ 6-10 (school board’s consideration of a proposed collective bargaining agreement with teachers was properly held in a closed session; collective bargaining meetings are exempt from Open Meetings Act requirements under R.C. 4117.21).

The Ohio Open Meetings Act

Chapter Nine: Duties of a Public Body

IX. Chapter Nine: Duties of a Public Body

The Open Meetings Act requires public bodies to provide: (A) openness, (B) notice, and (C) minutes.

A. Openness

The Open Meetings Act declares all meetings of a public body to be public meetings open to the public at all times.¹⁰³⁸ The General Assembly mandates that the Act be liberally construed to require that public officials take official action and “conduct all deliberations upon official business only in open meetings unless the subject matter is specifically excepted by law.”¹⁰³⁹

1. Where meetings may be held

A public body must conduct its meetings in a venue that is open to the public.¹⁰⁴⁰ Although the Open Meetings Act does not specifically address where a public body must hold meetings, some authority suggests that a public body must hold meetings in a public meeting place¹⁰⁴¹ that is within the geographical jurisdiction of the public body.¹⁰⁴² Clearly, a meeting is not “open” when the public body has locked the doors to the meeting facility.¹⁰⁴³

Where space in the facility is too limited to accommodate all interested members of the public, closed-circuit television may be an acceptable alternative.¹⁰⁴⁴ Allowing members of the public to observe the meeting from the hall and through the open meeting door may also be acceptable.¹⁰⁴⁵ Federal law requires that a meeting place be accessible to individuals with disabilities.¹⁰⁴⁶

2. Method of voting

Unless a particular statute requires a specific method of voting, the public cannot insist on a particular form of voting. The body may use its own discretion in determining the method it will use, such as voice vote, show of hands, or roll call.¹⁰⁴⁷ The Open Meetings Act only specifies the method of voting when a public body is adjourning into executive session by requiring that the vote for that purpose be by roll call.¹⁰⁴⁸ The Supreme Court of Ohio held that the Act precludes a public body from taking official action by way of secret ballot.¹⁰⁴⁹ Voting by secret ballot contradicts the openness requirement of the Open Meetings Act by hiding the decision-making process from public view.¹⁰⁵⁰

Using a consent agenda whereby a public body votes on the entire agenda in a single motion and with a single vote may violate the Open Meetings Act if doing so constructively closes a public meeting, or otherwise acts as a way around the openness requirement of the Act.¹⁰⁵¹ A public body is also prohibited from voting on a consent agenda when the public has no way of knowing all the items the consent agenda contains.¹⁰⁵²

3. Right to hear but not to be heard or to disrupt

The public must be able to hear meetings of a public body. Thus, one court found that members of a public body who whispered and passed documents among themselves constructively closed that portion of their meeting by intentionally preventing the audience from hearing or knowing the business the body discussed.¹⁰⁵³ However, the Open Meetings Act does not provide (or prohibit) attendees the right to be heard at meetings. Note that other laws may apply to limit the restrictions the public body can place on the public’s ability to speak during meetings.¹⁰⁵⁴ Further, a disruptive person waives his or her right to attend meetings, and the body may remove that person from the meeting.¹⁰⁵⁵

4. Audio and video recording

A public body cannot prohibit the public from audio or video recording a public meeting.¹⁰⁵⁶ A public body may, however, establish reasonable rules regulating the use of recording equipment, such as

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requiring equipment to be silent, unobtrusive, self-contained, and self-powered to limit interference with the ability of others to hear, see, and participate in the meeting.¹⁰⁵⁷

5. *Executive sessions*

Executive sessions (discussed below in Chapter Nine) are portions of open meetings from which the public can be excluded. However, public bodies may not vote or take official action in an executive session.¹⁰⁵⁸

B. *Notice*

Every public body must establish, by rule, a reasonable method for notifying the public in advance of its meetings.¹⁰⁵⁹ The public body's notice rule must provide for "notice that is consistent and actually reaches the public."¹⁰⁶⁰ The requirements for proper notice vary depending on the type of meeting a public body is conducting, as detailed in this section.

1. *Types of meetings and notice requirements*

a. *Regular meetings*

"Regular meetings" are those held at prescheduled intervals, such as monthly or annual meetings.¹⁰⁶¹ A public body must establish, by rule, a reasonable method that allows the public to know the *time* and *place* of regular meetings.¹⁰⁶²

b. *Special meetings*

A "special meeting" is any meeting other than a regular meeting.¹⁰⁶³ A public body must establish, by rule, a reasonable method that informs the public of the *time*, *place*, and *purpose* of special meetings¹⁰⁶⁴ and conforms with the following requirements:

- A public body must provide at least 24-hours advance notification of a special meeting to all media outlets that have requested such notification,¹⁰⁶⁵ except in the event of an emergency requiring immediate official action (see "Emergency meetings," below).
- When a public body holds a special meeting to discuss particular issues, the statement of the meeting's purpose must specifically indicate those issues, and the public body can only discuss those specified issues at that meeting.¹⁰⁶⁶ When a special meeting is simply a rescheduled "regular" meeting occurring at a different time, the statement of the meeting's purpose may be for "general purposes."¹⁰⁶⁷ Discussing matters at a special meeting that were not disclosed in the notice of purpose, either in open session or executive session, is a violation of the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰⁶⁸

c. *Emergency meetings*

An emergency meeting is a type of special meeting that a public body convenes when a situation requires immediate official action.¹⁰⁶⁹ Rather than the 24-hours advance notice usually required, a public body scheduling an emergency meeting must *immediately* notify all media outlets that have specifically requested such notice of the time, place, and purpose of the emergency meeting.¹⁰⁷⁰ The purpose statement must comport with the specificity requirements discussed above.

2. *Rules for giving notice*

The Open Meetings Act requires every public body to adopt rules establishing reasonable methods to notify the public of the time and place of all regularly scheduled meetings, and the time, place, and purpose of all special meetings.¹⁰⁷¹ A parent public body may impose its own notice rules on a subordinate committee.¹⁰⁷²

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Those rules must include a provision for any person, upon request and payment of a reasonable fee, to obtain reasonable advance notification of all meetings at which any specific type of public business is to be discussed.¹⁰⁷³ The statute says that provisions for advance notification may include mailing the agenda of meetings to all subscribers on a mailing list or mailing notices in self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided by the person requesting notice.¹⁰⁷⁴

3. Notice by publication

Courts have found that publication of meeting information in a newspaper is one reasonable method of noticing the public of its meetings.¹⁰⁷⁵ This method, however, does not satisfy the notice requirement if the public body does not have a rule providing for it or if the newspaper has discretion not to publish the information.¹⁰⁷⁶ Courts have addressed situations in which the media misprints meeting information and have not found a violation of the notice requirement.¹⁰⁷⁷ Many public bodies that adopt some other means of notice by rule also notify their local media of all regular, special, and emergency meetings as a courtesy.

C. Minutes

1. Content of minutes

A public body must keep full and accurate minutes of its meetings.¹⁰⁷⁸ Minutes do not have to be a verbatim transcript of the proceedings, but must include enough facts and information for the public to understand and appreciate the *rationale* behind the public body's decisions.¹⁰⁷⁹ Thus, minutes must include more than a record of roll call votes.¹⁰⁸⁰ However, minutes may be sufficient even if information such as the date of the meeting is missing.¹⁰⁸¹ Minutes are inadequate when they contain inaccuracies that are not corrected.¹⁰⁸² A public body cannot rely on sources other than their approved minutes to argue that their minutes contain a full and accurate record of their proceedings.¹⁰⁸³

Because executive sessions are not open to the public, the meeting minutes need to reflect only the general subject matter of the executive session via the motion to convene the session for a permissible purpose or purposes (see "Executive Session," discussed later in Chapter Ten).¹⁰⁸⁴ Including details of members' pre-vote discussion following an executive session may prove helpful, though. At least one court found that the lack of pre-vote comments reflected by the minutes supported the conclusion that the public body's discussion of the pros and cons of the matter at issue must have improperly occurred during executive session.¹⁰⁸⁵

2. Making minutes available "promptly" as a public record

A public body must promptly prepare, file, and make its minutes available for public inspection.¹⁰⁸⁶ The term "promptly" is not defined. One court has adopted the definition applied by courts to the Public Records Act (without delay and with reasonable speed, depending on the facts of each case), to define that term in the Open Meetings Act.¹⁰⁸⁷ The final version of the official minutes approved by members of the public body is a public record.¹⁰⁸⁸ Note that a draft version of the meeting minutes that the public body circulates for approval,¹⁰⁸⁹ as well as the clerk's handwritten notes used to draft minutes,¹⁰⁹⁰ may also be public records.

3. Medium on which minutes are kept

Because neither the Open Meetings Act nor the Public Records Act addresses the medium on which a public body must keep the official meeting minutes, a public body may make this decision itself. Some public bodies document that choice by adopting a formal rule or by passing a resolution or motion at a meeting.¹⁰⁹¹ Many public bodies make a contemporaneous audio recording of the meeting to use as a back-up in preparing written official minutes. The Ohio Attorney General has

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opined that such a recording constitutes a public record that the public body must make available for inspection upon request.¹⁰⁹²

D. Modified Duties of Public Bodies under Special Circumstances

1. Declared emergency

During a declared emergency,¹⁰⁹³ R.C. 5502.24(B) provides a limited exemption to fulfilling the requirements of the Open Meetings Act. If, due to a declared emergency, it becomes “imprudent, inexpedient, or impossible to conduct the affairs of local government at the regular or usual place,” the governing body may meet at an alternate site previously designated (by ordinance, resolution, or other manner) as the emergency location of government.¹⁰⁹⁴ Further, the public body may exercise its powers and functions in light of the exigencies of the emergency without regard to or compliance with time-consuming procedures and formalities of the Open Meetings Act. Even in an emergency, however, there is no exemption to the “in person” meeting requirement of R.C. 121.22(C), and the provision does not permit the public body to meet by teleconference, unless the public body otherwise has a specific statutory authority to do so.¹⁰⁹⁵

2. Municipal charters

The Open Meetings Act applies to public bodies at both the state and local government level. However, because the Ohio Constitution permits “home rule” (self-government), municipalities may adopt a charter under which their local governments operate.¹⁰⁹⁶ A charter municipality has the right to determine by charter the manner in which its meetings will be held.¹⁰⁹⁷ Charter provisions take precedence over the Open Meetings Act when the two conflict.¹⁰⁹⁸ If a municipal charter includes specific guidelines regarding the conduct of meetings, the municipality must abide by those guidelines.¹⁰⁹⁹ In addition, if a charter expressly requires that all meetings of the public bodies must be open, the municipality may not adopt ordinances that permit executive session.¹¹⁰⁰

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Notes:

¹⁰³⁸ [R.C. 121.22\(C\)](#).

¹⁰³⁹ [R.C. 121.22\(A\)](#).

¹⁰⁴⁰ [R.C. 121.22\(C\)](#); *State ex rel. Randles v. Hill*, 66 Ohio St.3d 32, 35 (1993) (locking the doors to the meeting hall, whether or not intentional, is not an excuse for failing to comply with the requirement that meetings be open to the public); *Paridon v. Trumbull Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2012-T-0035, 2013-Ohio-881, ¶ 22 (a public body may limit the time, place, and means of access to its meetings, if the restrictions are content neutral and narrowly tailored to serve a significant governmental interest).

¹⁰⁴¹ *Paridon v. Trumbull Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2012-T-0035, 2013-Ohio-881, ¶ 24 (“While [the Open Meetings Act] does not state where a public body must hold its public meetings, it has been held that the public body must use a public meeting place.”); [1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 032](#).

¹⁰⁴² [1992 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 032](#).

¹⁰⁴³ *Specht v. Finnegan*, 149 Ohio App.3d 201, 2002-Ohio-4660, ¶ 33-35 (6th Dist.).

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Wyse v. Rupp*, 6th Dist. Fulton No. F-94-19, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 4008 (Sept. 15, 1995) (Ohio Turnpike Commission handled large crowd in a reasonable and impartial manner when it aired the meeting via closed circuit television in an adjacent room).

¹⁰⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2023-P-0044, 2024-Ohio-146, ¶ 37-39. NOTE: the public body in this case was meeting when occupancy restrictions were in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 42 U.S.C. 12101 (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, P.L. §§ 201-202) (providing that remedy for violating this requirement would be under the ADA and does not appear to have any ramifications for the public body under the Open Meetings Act).

¹⁰⁴⁷ *But see State ex rel. Roberts v. Snyder*, 149 Ohio St. 333, 335 (1948) (council had no authority to adopt a conflicting rule when enabling law limited council president’s vote to solely in the event of a tie under statute that preceded enactment of Open Meetings Act).

¹⁰⁴⁸ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)](#).

¹⁰⁴⁹ *State ex rel. More Bratenahl v. Bratenahl*, 157 Ohio St.3d 309, 2019-Ohio-3233, ¶ 8-20; [2011 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 038](#) (voting by secret ballot is contrary to the principles of observing the workings of the government and holding government representatives accountable).

¹⁰⁵⁰ *State ex rel. Bratenahl v. Village of Bratenahl*, 157 Ohio St.3d 309, 2019-Ohio-3233, ¶ 15.

¹⁰⁵¹ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 165 Ohio St.3d 292, 2021-Ohio-2374, ¶ 19 (public body violated the Open Meetings Act when it approved multiple consent agendas in a single vote; use of a consent agenda in such a way “constructively closes its public meetings and is an impermissible end run around the Open Meetings Act”).

¹⁰⁵² *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 165 Ohio St.3d 292, 2021-Ohio-2374, ¶ 19.

¹⁰⁵³ *Manogg v. Stickle*, 5th Dist. Licking No. 97CA00104, 1998 Ohio App. LEXIS 1961 (Apr. 8, 1998).

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Black v. Mecca Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 91 Ohio App.3d 351, 356 (11th Dist. 1993) (the Open Meetings Act does not require that a public body give the public an opportunity to comment at its meetings, but if public participation is permitted, it is subject to the protections of the First and Fourteenth Amendments); *Forman v. Blaser*, 3d Dist. Seneca No. 13-87-12, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 3405 (Aug. 8, 1988) (the Open Meetings Act guarantees the right to observe a meeting, but not necessarily the right to be heard); *see also Paridon v. Trumbull Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2012-T-0035, 2013-Ohio-881, ¶ 19-29 (while the Public Records Act permits a requester to be anonymous when making a public records request, the Open Meetings Act does not have a similar anonymity requirement; thus a public body can require attendees at meetings to disclose their identities by signing a sign-in sheet as long as the practice is content-neutral and narrowly tailored to serve a significant interest).

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Froehlich v. Ohio State Med. Bd.*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 15AP-666, 2016-Ohio-1035, ¶ 25-27 (no violation of Open Meetings Act where disruptive person is removed); *Forman v. Blaser*, 3d Dist. Seneca No. 13-87-12, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 3405, *8 (Aug. 8, 1988) (“When an audience becomes so uncontrollable that the public body cannot deliberate, it would seem that the audience waives its right to, or is estopped from claiming a right under the Sunshine Law to continue to observe the proceedings.”); *see also Jones v. Heyman*, 888 F.2d 1328, 1333 (11th Cir. 1989) (no violation of First or Fourteenth Amendments when disruptive person was removed from a public meeting).

¹⁰⁵⁶ *McVey v. Carthage Twp. Trustees*, 4th Dist. Athens No. 04CA44, 2005-Ohio-2869, ¶ 14-15 (trustees violated the Open Meetings Act when they banned videotaping of their meetings).

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Kline v. Davis*, 4th Dist. Lawrence Nos. 00CA32, 01CA13, 2001-Ohio-2625 (blanket prohibition on recording a public meeting is not permissible); [1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 087](#) (opining that trustees have authority to adopt reasonable rules for use of recording equipment at their meetings); *see also Mahajan v. State Med. Bd. of Ohio*, 10th Dist. Franklin Nos. 11AP-421, 11AP-422, 2011-Ohio-6728 (when rule allowed board to designate reasonable location for placement of recording equipment, requiring appellant’s court reporter to move to the back of the room was reasonable, given the need to transact board business).

¹⁰⁵⁸ [R.C. 121.22\(A\)](#); *Mansfield City Council v. Richland Cty. Council AFL-CIO*, 5th Dist. Richland No. 03CA55, 2003 Ohio App. LEXIS 6654, *12 (Dec. 24, 2003) (reaching a consensus to take no action on a pending matter, as reflected by members’ comments, is impermissible during an executive session).

¹⁰⁵⁹ [R.C. 121.22\(F\)](#); *Katterhenrich v. Fed. Hocking Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 121 Ohio App.3d 579, 587 (4th Dist. 1997) (“Typically, one would expect regular meetings to be scheduled well in advance”).

¹⁰⁶⁰ *State ex rel. Patrick Bros. v. Putnam Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 3d Dist. Putnam No. 12-13-05, 2014-Ohio-2717, ¶ 24; *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 268, 272 (2d Dist. 2002).

¹⁰⁶¹ [1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 029](#); *Katterhenrich v. Fed. Hocking Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 121 Ohio App.3d 579, 587 (4th Dist. 1997).

¹⁰⁶² [R.C. 121.22\(F\)](#); *see also Wyse v. Rupp*, 6th Dist. Fulton No. F-94-19, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 4008, *21 (Sept. 15, 1995) (finding a public body must specifically identify the time at which a public meeting will start).

¹⁰⁶³ *State ex rel. Fairfield Leader v. Ricketts*, 56 Ohio St.3d 97, 100 (1990) (“The council either meets in a regular session or it does not, and any session that is not regular is special.”); [1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 029](#) (opining that, “[w]hile the term ‘special meeting’ is not defined in R.C. 121.22, its use in context indicates that a reference to all meetings other than ‘regular’ meetings was intended”).

¹⁰⁶⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(F\)](#); *see also Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 268, 272-73 (2d Dist. 2002) (a board violated the Open Meetings Act by failing to establish, by rule, method to provide reasonable notice to the public of time, place, and purpose of special meetings); *State ex rel. Stiller v. Columbiana Exempted Village School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 74 Ohio St.3d 113, 119-20 (1995) (public body did not violate the Open Meetings Act when it gave general notice that nonrenewal of contract would be discussed, even though ancillary matters were also discussed).

¹⁰⁶⁵ [R.C. 121.22\(F\)](#); [1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 029](#).

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Keystone Comm. v. Switzerland of Ohio School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Monroe No. 15 MO 0011, 2016-Ohio-4663, ¶ 35-36, 40-43 (special meeting notice of “2015-2016 school year” was not specific enough to meeting’s purpose to discuss a school closure, and large crowds did not prove notice was sufficient); *State ex rel. Young v. Lebanon City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 12th Dist. Warren No. CA2012-02-013, 2013-Ohio-1111 (school board failed to comply with special meeting notice requirements when notice indicated that the purpose of the special meeting was “community information,” but during the meeting the board entered executive session “to discuss negotiations with public employees concerning their compensation and other terms and conditions of their employment”); *State ex rel. Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0019, 2019-Ohio-5412, ¶ 56 (special meeting notice of “budget approval” was sufficiently specific to cover discussion of invoice payments).

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¹⁰⁶⁷ *Jones v. Brookfield Twp. Trustees*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 92-T-4692, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 2805 (June 30, 1995); see also *Satterfield v. Adams Cty. Ohio Valley School Dist.*, 4th Dist. Adams No. 95CA611, 1996 Ohio App. LEXIS 4897, *17 (Nov. 6, 1996) (although specific agenda items may be listed, use of agenda term “personnel” is sufficient for notice of special meeting).

¹⁰⁶⁸ *State ex rel. Jones v. Bd. of Edn. of the Dayton Pub. Schs.*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 27649, 2018-Ohio-676, ¶ 51-66 (action taken in open session of special meeting exceeded the scope of the notice); *Hoops v. Jerusalem Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-97-1240, 1998 Ohio App. LEXIS 1496, *13 (Apr. 10, 1998) (business transacted at special meetings exceeded scope of published purpose and thus violated R.C. 121.22(F)). But see *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2-16-P-0057, 2017-Ohio-4237, ¶ 46 (public bodies may convene into executive session in emergency meetings; doing so did not exceed the scope of the special meeting notice).

¹⁰⁶⁹ *State ex rel. Bates v. Smith*, 147 Ohio St.3d 322, 2016-Ohio-5449, ¶ 13-17 (“emergency” meeting was improper because there was no suggestion of any emergency that would necessitate such a meeting); *Neuvirth v. Bd. of Trustees of Bainbridge Twp.*, 11th Dist. Geauga No. 919, 1981 Ohio App. LEXIS 14641, **2-4 (Jun. 29, 1981) (meetings were not emergencies when evidence showed that matters could have been scheduled any time in the preceding two or three months; the public body could not postpone considering the matter until the last minute and then claim an emergency). But see *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2-16-P-0057, 2017-Ohio-4237, ¶ 39 (rejecting the argument “that an emergency session is invalid under R.C. 121.22(F) where a public body decides not to take official action at the close of the session”).

¹⁰⁷⁰ R.C. 121.22(F).

¹⁰⁷¹ R.C. 121.22(F).

¹⁰⁷² *Ames v. Geauga Cty. Invest. Advisory Comm.*, 11th Dist. Geauga No. 2022-G-0035, 2023-Ohio-2252, ¶ 49.

¹⁰⁷³ R.C. 121.22(F); *State ex rel. Patrick Bros v. Putnam Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 3d Dist. Putnam No. 12-13-05, 2014-Ohio-2717, ¶ 33-37.

¹⁰⁷⁴ These requirements notwithstanding, many courts have held that actions taken by a public body are not invalid simply because the body failed to adopt notice rules. These courts reason that the purpose of the law’s invalidation section (R.C. 121.22(H)) is to invalidate actions taken when insufficient notice of the meeting was provided. See *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 268, 271 (2d Dist. 2002); *Hoops v. Jerusalem Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-97-1240, 1998 Ohio App. LEXIS 1496 (Apr. 10, 1998); *Barbeck v. Twinsburg Twp.*, 73 Ohio App.3d 587 (9th Dist. 1992).

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Black v. Mecca Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 91 Ohio App.3d 351, 356 (11th Dist. 1993); *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 268, 272 (2d Dist. 2002) (“If the board would establish a rule providing that it would notify these newspapers and direct the newspapers to publish this notice consistently, it would satisfy the first paragraph of R.C. 121.22(F).”).

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 268, 272 (2d Dist. 2002).

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Black v. Mecca Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 91 Ohio App.3d 351, 356 (11th Dist. 1993) (chairman of zoning commission testified that he correctly reported meeting time to newspaper but newspaper mispublished it); *Swickrath & Sons, Inc. v. Elida*, 3d Dist. Allen No. 1-03-46, 2003-Ohio-6288, ¶ 19 (no violation from newspaper’s misprinting of meeting start time when village had three separate methods of providing notice of its meetings and village official made numerous phone calls to newspaper requesting correction).

¹⁰⁷⁸ R.C. 121.22(C).

¹⁰⁷⁹ *White v. Clinton Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 76 Ohio St.3d 416, 424 (1996) (“[F]ull and accurate minutes must contain sufficient facts and information to permit the public to understand and appreciate the rationale behind the relevant public body’s decision.”). See also *State ex rel. Citizens for Open, Responsive & Accountable Govt. v. Register*, 116 Ohio St.3d 88, 2007-Ohio-5542, ¶ 27-29 (construing R.C. 121.22, 149.43, and 507.04 together, a township fiscal officer has a duty to maintain full and accurate minutes and records of the proceedings, as well as the accounts and transactions of the board of township trustees); *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 9-11 (absent evidence of alleged missing details or discussions, meeting minutes stating a vote was taken and providing the resolution number being voted on were sufficient); *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2021-P-0118, 2022-Ohio-1012, ¶ 4 (public body prepared full and accurate minutes, even though minutes referenced a report that was attached as an exhibit, because the minutes never purported to attach the report as an exhibit or otherwise expressly incorporate the report).

¹⁰⁸⁰ *White v. Clinton Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 76 Ohio St.3d 416, 424 (1996) (minutes “certainly should not be limited to a mere recounting of the body’s roll call votes,” but must contain “a more substantial treatment of the items discussed”).

¹⁰⁸¹ *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Solid Waste Mgt. Dist. Bd. of Commrs.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2023-P-0045, 2023-Ohio-4870.

¹⁰⁸² *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Board of Commrs.*, 165 Ohio St.3d 292, 2021-Ohio-2374, ¶ 23 (public body failed to keep full and accurate minutes when minutes referenced attachment that was not in the approved minutes or produced to requester).

¹⁰⁸³ *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 58 (2001); but see *Shaffer v. W. Farmington*, 82 Ohio App.3d 579, 585 (11th Dist. 1992) (minutes may not be conclusive evidence on whether roll call vote was taken); *State ex rel. MORE Bratenahl v. Bratenahl*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 105281, 2018-Ohio-497, ¶ 25 (“[T]he meeting minutes in question, along with the transcripts of the subsequent council meetings, provide an accurate and adequate record[.]”), *rev’d on other grounds*, 157 Ohio St.3d 309, 2019-Ohio-3233.

¹⁰⁸⁴ R.C. 121.22(C).

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Piekutowski v. S. Cent. Ohio Edn. Serv. Ctr. Governing Bd.*, 161 Ohio App.3d 372, 380, 2005-Ohio-2868 (4th Dist.).

¹⁰⁸⁶ R.C. 121.22(C); see also *White v. Clinton Cty. Bd. of Commrs.*, 76 Ohio St.3d 416 (1996); *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 57 (2001) (audiotapes that are later erased do not meet requirement to maintain minutes).

¹⁰⁸⁷ *State ex rel. Young v. Lebanon City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 12th Dist. Warren No. CA2012-02-013, 2013-Ohio-1111, ¶ 33 (reading R.C. 121.22 with R.C. 3313.26, school board failed to “promptly” prepare minutes where it was three months behind in approving minutes and did not approve minutes at the next respective meeting).

¹⁰⁸⁸ R.C. 121.22(C).

¹⁰⁸⁹ *State ex rel. Doe v. Register*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2008-08-081, 2009-Ohio-2448, ¶ 28.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *State ex rel. Verhovec v. Marietta*, 4th Dist. Washington No. 12CA32, 2013-Ohio-5415, ¶ 19-30.

¹⁰⁹¹ In *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 57 (2001), the Supreme Court found meritless the council’s contention that audiotapes complied with Open Meetings Act requirements because they were not treated as official minutes, e.g., council approved written minutes, did not tape all meetings, and voted to erase tapes after written minutes had been approved.

¹⁰⁹² 2008 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 019 (opining that an audio tape recording of a meeting that is created for the purpose of taking notes to create an accurate record of the meeting is a public record for purposes of the Public Records Act; the recording must be made available for public inspection and copying and retained in accordance with the terms of the records retention schedule for such a record).

¹⁰⁹³ “Emergency” is defined as “any period during which the congress of the United States or a chief executive has declared or proclaimed that an emergency exists.” R.C. 5502.21 (F). “Chief executive” is defined as “the president of the United States, the governor of this state, the board of county commissioners of any county, the board of township trustees of any township, or the mayor or city manager of any municipal corporation within this state.” R.C. 5502.21(C).

¹⁰⁹⁴ R.C. 5502.24(B).

¹⁰⁹⁵ 2009 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 034; R.C. 5502.24(B).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ohio Constitution, Article XVIII, Sections 3, 7.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *State ex rel. Plain Dealer Publishing Co. v. Barnes*, 38 Ohio St.3d 165, 168 (1988) (finding it unnecessary to decide the applicability of the Open Meetings Act because the charter language expressly provided for open meetings and encompassed the meeting at issue); *Hills & Dales, Inc. v.*

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Wooster, 4 Ohio App.3d 240, 242-43 (9th Dist. 1982) (finding a charter municipality need not comply with the Open Meetings Act; there is “nothing in the Wooster Charter which mandates that all meetings of the city council and/or the city planning commission must be open to the public”).

¹⁰⁹⁸ *State ex rel. Lightfield v. Indian Hill*, 69 Ohio St.3d 441, 442 (1994) (“In matters of local self-government, if a portion of a municipal charter expressly conflicts with a parallel state law, the charter provisions will prevail.”); *Kanter v. Cleveland Heights*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 104375, 2017-Ohio-1038 (city council did not have to follow the mandates of the Open Meetings Act when its charter permitted it to maintain its own rules, and those rules distinguished council meetings from special meetings, and made recording minutes of council meetings discretionary); *Kujvila v. Newton Falls*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2016-T-0010, 2017-Ohio-7957, ¶ 32-35.

¹⁰⁹⁹ *State ex rel. Bond v. Montgomery*, 63 Ohio App.3d 728, 736 (1st Dist. 1989) (“If a city does choose to draft its own rules concerning the meeting of a public body and the rules are included in its charter, the city council must abide by those rules.”); *State ex rel. Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Cincinnati City Council*, 137 Ohio App.3d 589, 592 (1st Dist. 2001) (rules of city council cannot supersede city charter that mandates all meetings be open).

¹¹⁰⁰ *State ex rel. Inskeep v. Staten*, 74 Ohio St.3d 676 (1996); see also *Johnson v. Kindig*, 9th Dist. Wayne No. 00CA0095, 2001 Ohio App. LEXIS 3569, **8-9 (Aug. 15, 2001) (when charter explicitly states that all meetings shall be public and contains no explicit exemptions, charter’s reference to Open Meetings Act is insufficient to allow for executive sessions).

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X. Chapter Ten: Executive Session

Executive Session Overview

- Executive session is a portion of an open meeting from which the public can be excluded.
- Proper procedure is required to move into executive session:
 - Meetings must always begin and end in open session, where the public may be present
 - Motion on the record to move into executive session, followed by a second
 - Specific reason for executive session must be put in the motion and recorded
 - Roll call vote, which must be approved by the majority of a quorum of the public body
 - Motion and vote recorded in the meeting minutes
- Executive session can only be held for the following reasons:
 - Certain personnel matters
 - Purchase or sale of property
 - Pending or imminent court action
 - Collective bargaining matters
 - Matters required to be kept confidential
 - Security matters
 - Hospital trade secrets
 - Confidential business information of an applicant for economic development assistance
 - Veterans Service Commission applications
- Discussion in executive session must be limited to the specific, statutory reason for the executive session, as set forth in the motion.
- The public body can invite non-members to be present in an executive session, but cannot exclude other members of the public body from the executive session.
- Discussion in executive session is not automatically confidential, but other confidentiality rules may apply; public records considered in the executive session may be accessible through the Public Records Act.
- The public body may not vote or make any decisions in executive session.

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A. General Principles

An “executive session” is a conference between members of a public body from which the public is excluded.¹¹⁰¹ The public body, however, may *invite* anyone it chooses to attend an executive session.¹¹⁰² The Open Meetings Act strictly limits the use of executive sessions in several ways. First, a public body may only hold executive sessions at regular and special meetings.¹¹⁰³ Second, the Open Meetings Act limits the matters that a public body may discuss in executive session to those matters identified in the Act,¹¹⁰⁴ although one court held that a public body may discuss other related issues if they have a direct bearing on the permitted matter(s).¹¹⁰⁵ Third, a public body must follow a specific procedure to adjourn into an executive session.¹¹⁰⁶ Finally, a public body may not take any formal action, such as voting or otherwise reaching a collective decision, in an executive session; any formal action taken in an executive session is invalid.¹¹⁰⁷

The Open Meetings Act does not prohibit the public body or one of its members from disclosing the information discussed in executive session.¹¹⁰⁸ However, other laws may prohibit such disclosure.¹¹⁰⁹ An Ohio Ethics Commission Opinion concluded that if information discussed in executive session is made confidential by statute, or has been clearly designated as confidential, public officials may have a duty to keep that information confidential under Ohio ethic laws.¹¹¹⁰ Public officials should seek legal counsel to determine whether ethics laws prohibit them from disclosing topics discussed during executive session.

The privacy afforded by the Open Meetings Act to executive session discussions does not make confidential any documents that a public body may discuss in executive session. If a document is a “public record” and is not otherwise exempt under one of the exemptions to the Public Records Act, the record will still be subject to public disclosure even if the public body appropriately discussed it in executive session. Thus, an executive session under the Open Meetings Act is not an exemption for public records under the Public Records Act. For example, if a public body properly discusses pending litigation in executive session, a settlement agreement negotiated during that executive session and reduced to writing may be subject to public disclosure.¹¹¹¹

B. Permissible Discussion Topics in Executive Session

A public body can only adjourn into executive session to discuss one of the following nine topics.

1. *Certain personnel matters when particularly named in motion*

A public body may adjourn into executive session:

- To consider the appointment, employment, dismissal, discipline, promotion, demotion, or compensation of a public employee or official; and
- To consider the investigation of charges or complaints against a public employee, official, licensee, or regulated individual,¹¹¹² unless the employee, official, licensee, or regulated individual requests a public hearing;¹¹¹³
but
- A public body may not hold an executive session to consider the discipline of an elected official for conduct related to the performance of the official’s duties or to consider that person’s removal from office.

A motion to adjourn into executive session must specify which of the *particular* personnel matter(s) listed in the statute the movant proposes to discuss. A motion “to discuss personnel matters” *is not sufficiently specific and does not comply with the statute*.¹¹¹⁴ One court has concluded that a public body violated the Open Meetings Act by going into executive session for the stated purpose of an employee’s “evaluation.” That court did not “necessarily disagree” that the Act allows discussion on an employee’s “job performance” in executive session, but it concluded that “the public body must

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specify the context in which ‘job performance’ will be considered by identifying one of the statutory purposes set forth in R.C. 121.22(G).¹¹¹⁵ The motion need not include the name of the person involved in the specified personnel matter¹¹¹⁶ or disclose “private facts.”¹¹¹⁷

Appellate courts disagree whether a public body must limit its discussion of personnel in an executive session to a specific individual or may include broader discussion of employee matters. At least three appellate courts have held that the language of the Open Meetings Act clearly limits discussion in executive session to consideration of a specific employee’s employment, dismissal, etc.¹¹¹⁸ These court decisions are based on the plain language in the Act, which requires that “all meetings of any public body are declared to be open to the public at all times,”¹¹¹⁹ meaning any exemptions to openness should be drawn narrowly. A different appellate court, however, looked to a different provision in the Act that permits the public body to exclude the name of any person to be considered during the executive session as allowing general personnel discussions.¹¹²⁰ It is important for a public body to consult the case law within its own appellate district to determine what applies.

2. *Purchase or sale of property*

A public body may adjourn into executive session to consider the purchase of property of any sort – real, personal, tangible, or intangible.¹¹²¹ A public body may also adjourn into executive session to consider the sale of real or personal property by competitive bid, or the sale or disposition of unneeded, obsolete, or unfit property under R.C. 505.10, if disclosure of the information would result in a competitive advantage to the person whose personal, private interest is adverse to the general public interest.¹¹²² No member of a public body may use this exemption as subterfuge to provide covert information to prospective buyers or sellers.¹¹²³

3. *Pending or imminent court action*

A public body may adjourn into executive session with the public body’s attorney to discuss a pending or imminent court action.¹¹²⁴ Court action is “pending” if a lawsuit has been commenced, and it is “imminent” if it is on the brink of commencing.¹¹²⁵ Courts have concluded that threatened litigation is imminent and may be discussed in executive session.¹¹²⁶ However, a general discussion of legal matters is not a sufficient basis for invoking this provision.¹¹²⁷ Note that a member of a public body is not necessarily the public body’s duly-appointed counsel simply because the member happens to also be an attorney.¹¹²⁸

4. *Collective bargaining matters*

A public body may adjourn into executive session to prepare for, conduct, or review a collective bargaining strategy.¹¹²⁹

5. *Matters required to be kept confidential*

A public body may adjourn into executive session to discuss matters that federal law or regulations or state statutes require the public body to keep confidential.¹¹³⁰ The common law attorney-client privilege does not qualify under this enumerated exemption to allow general legal advice in executive session because the public body is not *required* to assert the privilege.¹¹³¹

6. *Security matters*

A public body may adjourn into executive session to discuss details of security arrangements and emergency response protocols for a public body or public office if disclosure of the matters discussed could reasonably be expected to jeopardize the security of the public body or public office.¹¹³²

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7. *Hospital trade secrets*

Certain hospital public bodies established by counties, joint townships, or municipalities may adjourn into executive session to discuss trade secrets as defined by R.C. 1333.61.¹¹³³

8. *Confidential business information of an applicant for economic development assistance*

This topic requires that the information to be discussed in executive session be directly related to economic development assistance of specified types listed in the statute.¹¹³⁴ “A unanimous quorum of the public body [must determine], by a roll call vote, that the executive session is necessary to protect the interests of the applicant or the possible investment or expenditure of public funds to be made in connection with the economic development project.”¹¹³⁵

9. *Veterans Service Commission applications*

A Veterans Service Commission must hold an executive session when considering an applicant’s request for financial assistance unless the applicant requests a public hearing.¹¹³⁶ Note that, unlike the other discussion topics, discussion of Veterans Service Commission applications in executive session is mandatory.

C. *Proper Procedures for Executive Session*

A public body may only hold an executive session at a regular or special meeting, and a meeting that includes an executive session must always begin and end in an open session.¹¹³⁷ In order to begin an executive session, there must be a proper motion approved by a majority¹¹³⁸ of a quorum of the public body, using a roll call vote.¹¹³⁹

1. *The motion*

A motion for executive session must specifically identify “which one or more of the approved matters listed ... are to be considered at the executive session.”¹¹⁴⁰ Thus, if the public body intends to discuss one of the matters included in the personnel exemption in executive session, the motion must specify which of those specific matters it will discuss (e.g., “I move to go into executive session to consider the promotion or compensation of a public employee.”).¹¹⁴¹ It is not sufficient to simply state “personnel” as a reason for executive session.¹¹⁴² The motion does not need to identify the person whom the public body intends to discuss.¹¹⁴³ Similarly, reiterating “the laundry list of possible matters from R.C. 121.22(G)(1) without specifying which of those purposes [will] be discussed in executive session” is improper.¹¹⁴⁴ Finally, a public body’s motion to enter into executive session should include all the topics it might reasonably discuss during an executive session. But the public body is not required to discuss every topic it included in the motion during executive session.¹¹⁴⁵

2. *The roll call vote*

Members of a public body may adjourn into executive session only after a majority of a quorum of the public body approves the motion by a roll call vote.¹¹⁴⁶ The vote may not be by a show of hands, and the public body should record the vote in its minutes.¹¹⁴⁷

Although a proper motion is required before entering executive session, a motion to end the executive session and return to public session is not necessary because the closed-door discussion is “off the record.” Similarly, a public body does not have to take minutes during executive session. Note that any minutes taken during executive session may be subject to the Public Records Act. The minutes of the meeting need only document a motion to go into executive session that properly identifies the permissible topic or topics that the public body will discuss, as well as the return to open session (e.g., “We are now back on the record.”).

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Notes:

¹¹⁰¹ *Weisel v. Palmyra Twp. Bd. of Zoning Appeals*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 90-P-2193, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 3379 (July 19, 1991); *Davidson v. Sheffield-Sheffield Lake Bd. of Edn.*, 9th Dist. Lorain No. 89-CA004624, 1990 Ohio App. LEXIS 2190 (May 23, 1990).

¹¹⁰² *Chudner v. Cleveland City School Dist.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 68572, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 3303, **8-9 (Aug. 10, 1995) (inviting select individuals to attend an executive session is not a violation as long as no formal action of the public body will occur).

¹¹⁰³ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)](#).

¹¹⁰⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(1\)-\(8\), \(J\)](#).

¹¹⁰⁵ *Chudner v. Cleveland City School Dist.*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 68572, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 3303 (Aug. 10, 1995) (finding that issues discussed in executive session each had a direct bearing on topic that was permissible subject of executive session discussion).

¹¹⁰⁶ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(1\), \(7\)](#) (requiring roll call vote and specificity in motion).

¹¹⁰⁷ [R.C. 121.22\(H\)](#).

¹¹⁰⁸ *But see* [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(2\)](#) (providing that “no member of a public body shall use [executive session under property exemption] as a subterfuge for providing covert information to prospective buyers or sellers”).

¹¹⁰⁹ *See, e.g.,* [R.C. 102.03\(B\)](#) (providing that a public official must not disclose or use any information acquired in course of official duties that is confidential because of statutory provisions or that has been clearly designated as confidential); *Humphries v. Chicarelli*, S.D. Ohio No. 1:10-cv-749, 2012 Ohio App. LEXIS 168038, at *14-15 (Nov. 27, 2012) (prohibiting city council members from testifying as to attorney-client privileged matters discussed during executive session); *Talismanic Properties, LLC v. Tipp City*, S.D. Ohio No. 3:16-cv-285, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 90290, *6-7 (June 9, 2017) (when city council entered executive session to discuss pending litigation—this case—and allegedly made the decision not to mediate, those discussions were privileged and not subject to discovery in the subsequent litigation when (1) the council did not violate the Open Meetings Act and (2) even if it had, the information was protected by attorney-client privilege).

¹¹¹⁰ [OEC Adv.Op. 20-02](#), 2020 Ohio Ethics Comm. LEXIS 2.

¹¹¹¹ *State ex rel. Findlay Publishing Co. v. Hancock Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 80 Ohio St.3d 134, 138, 1997-Ohio-353 (“Since a settlement agreement contains the result of the bargaining process rather than revealing the details of the negotiations which led to the result, R.C. 121.22(G)(3), which exempts from public view only the conferences themselves, would not exempt a settlement agreement from disclosure.”).

¹¹¹² [R.C. 121.22\(B\)\(3\)](#) (defining “regulated individual” as (a) a student in a state or local public educational institution or (b) a person who is, voluntarily or involuntarily, an inmate, patient, or resident of a state or local institution because of criminal behavior, mental illness or intellectual disability, disease, disability, age, or other condition requiring custodial care).

¹¹¹³ This provision does not create a substantive right to a public hearing. *See Matheny v. Frontier Local Bd. of Edn.*, 62 Ohio St.2d 362, 368 (1980) (“[T]he term ‘public hearing’ in subdivision (G)(1) of the Open Meetings Act refers only to the hearings elsewhere provided by law.”). An employee who has a statutory right to a hearing may request a public hearing and prevent executive session. *Schmidt v. Newton*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-110470, 2012-Ohio-890, ¶ 26 (“Only when a hearing is statutorily authorized, and a public hearing is requested, does R.C. 121.22(G) operate as a bar to holding an executive session to consider the dismissal of a public employee.”); *Brownfield v. Warren Local School Bd. of Edn.*, 4th Dist. Washington No. 89 CA 26, 1990 Ohio App. LEXIS 3878, *13 (Aug. 28, 1990) (finding that, upon request, a teacher was entitled to have deliberations regarding his dismissal occur in open meetings). An employee with no statutory right to a hearing may not prevent discussion of his or her employment in executive session. *Stewart v. Lockland School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-130263, 2013-Ohio-5513; *Nosse v. City of Kirtland*, 11th Dist. Lake No. 2022-L-032, 2022-Ohio-4161 (when a public body is acting in a quasi-judicial capacity, the adjudicatory hearing process is not a meeting under the Open Meetings Act; thus, the public body’s deliberations may be held privately in executive session).

¹¹¹⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(1\), \(7\)](#) (requiring roll call vote and specificity in motion); *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 59 (2001) (finding respondents violated the Open Meetings Act by using general terms like “personnel” and “personnel and finances” instead of one or more of the specified statutory purposes listed in division (G)(1)); *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 18-21 (general reference to “personnel matters” or “personnel issues” is insufficient); *Jones v. Brookfield Twp. Trustees*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 92-T-4692, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 2805, *8 (June 30, 1995) (stating “[p]olice personnel matters” does not constitute substantial compliance because it does not refer to any of the specific purposes listed in the Open Meetings Act); *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 25 (minutes stating that executive session was convened for “personnel issues” did not comply with the Open Meetings Act).

¹¹¹⁵ *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 19; *see also* *Lawrence v. Edon*, 6th Dist. Williams No. WM-05-001, 2005-Ohio-5883 (Open Meetings Act does not prohibit a public body from discussing a public employee’s evaluations or job performance in executive session). NOTE: the proper context and enumerated exemption in *Lawrence v. Edon* was “dismissal or discipline”—other enumerated exemptions that might constitute proper contexts for considering employee evaluations include “employment,” “promotion,” “demotion,” or “compensation.”

¹¹¹⁶ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(1\)](#).

¹¹¹⁷ *Smith v. Pierce Twp.*, 12th Dist. Clermont No. CA2013-10-079, 2014-Ohio-3291, ¶ 50-55 (finding public body’s required publication of statutory purposes under R.C. 121.22(G)(1) for special meetings and executive sessions did not support claim of invasion of privacy under a publicity theory).

¹¹¹⁸ *State ex rel. Patrick Bros. v. Putnam Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 3d Dist. Putnam No. 12-13-05, 2014-Ohio-2717, ¶ 36; *Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Chillicothe City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 41 Ohio App.3d 218 (4th Dist. 1988); *Davidson v. Sheffield-Sheffield Lake Bd. of Edn.*, 9th Dist. Lorain No. 89-CA004624, 1990 Ohio App. LEXIS 2190 (May 23, 1990) (rejecting the argument that an executive session was illegally held for a dual, unauthorized purpose when it was held to discuss termination of a specific employee’s employment due to budgetary considerations).

¹¹¹⁹ [R.C. 121.22\(C\)](#).

¹¹²⁰ *Wright v. Mt. Vernon City Council*, 5th Dist. Knox No. 97-CA-7, 1997 Ohio App. LEXIS 4931 (Oct. 23, 1997) (public body could discuss merit raises for exempt city employees in executive session without referring to individuals in particular positions).

¹¹²¹ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(2\)](#); *see also* 1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 003. A public body can convene into executive session “[t]o consider the purchase of property for public purposes” without additional qualification, e.g., “if the premature disclosure of information would give an unfair competitive or bargaining advantage to a person whose personal, private interest is adverse to the general public interest.” *Look Ahead Am. v. Stark Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 5th Dist. No. 2022-CA-00152, 2023-Ohio-2494, appeal pending, S.Ct. No. 2023-1059.

¹¹²² [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(2\)](#); *see also* 1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 003.

¹¹²³ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(2\)](#).

¹¹²⁴ [R.C. 121.22\(G\)\(3\)](#); *State ex rel. Ames v. Brimfield Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0018, 2019-Ohio-5311, ¶ 32 (finding there is no requirement that an attorney be physically present for the exception under R.C. 121.22(G)(3) to apply, and board properly conducted conference in executive session with attorney via telephone).

¹¹²⁵ *State ex rel. Cincinnati Enquirer v. Hamilton Cty. Comms.*, 1st Dist. Hamilton No. C-010605, 2002-Ohio-2038, ¶ 20 (“imminent” is satisfied when a public body has moved beyond mere investigation and assumed an aggressive litigative posture manifested by the decision to commit government resources to the prospective litigation); *but see* *Greene Cty. Guidance Ctr., Inc. v. Greene-Clinton Community Mental Health Bd.*, 19 Ohio App.3d 1, 5 (2d Dist. 1984) (finding a discussion with legal counsel in executive session under 121.22(G)(3) is permitted when litigation is a “reasonable prospect”).

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¹¹²⁶ *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 22 (finding letter expressly threatening litigation if a settlement is not reached “reasonably made a lawsuit appear imminent”).

¹¹²⁷ *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 25 (executive session was improper when minutes stated that it was convened for “legal issues”); *State ex rel. Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0019, 2019-Ohio-5412, ¶ 36 (because meeting minutes did not indicate that board convened in executive session to discuss “pending or imminent court action,” executive session was improper even though it included discussion with an attorney).

¹¹²⁸ *Tobacco Use Prevention & Control Found. Bd. of Trustees v. Boyce*, 185 Ohio App.3d 707, 2009-Ohio-6993, ¶ 66-69 (10th Dist.) (board members and executive director who were attorneys were not acting as legal counsel for the board when they discussed legal matters in executive session), *aff’d* 127 Ohio St.3d 511, 2010-Ohio-6207, ¶ 8, 27-29; *Awadalla v. Robinson Mem. Hosp.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 91-P-2385, 1992 Ohio App. LEXIS 2838, *7 (June 5, 1992) (executive session improper when a board’s “attorney” was identified as “senior vice president” in meeting minutes).

¹¹²⁹ *R.C. 121.22(G)(4)*; see also *Back v. Madison Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 12th Dist. Butler No. CA2007-03-006, 2007-Ohio-4218, ¶ 8 (a school board’s meeting with a labor organization to renegotiate teachers’ salaries was proper because the meeting was not an executive session but was a “collective bargaining meeting,” which was exempt from the Open Meetings Act’s requirements under R.C. 4117.21).

¹¹³⁰ *R.C. 121.22(G)(5)*.

¹¹³¹ *State ex rel. Hardin v. Clermont Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 12th Dist. Clermont Nos. CA2011-05-045, CA2011-06-047, 2012-Ohio-2569, ¶ 75-79; *State ex rel. Ames v. Brimfield Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0018, 2019-Ohio-5311, ¶ 27; *State ex rel. Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0019, 2019-Ohio-5412, ¶ 39-42.

¹¹³² *R.C. 121.22(G)(6)*.

¹¹³³ *R.C. 121.22(G)(7)*.

¹¹³⁴ *R.C. 121.22(G)(8)(a)*.

¹¹³⁵ *R.C. 121.22(G)(8)(b)*; *State ex rel. Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0019, 2019-Ohio-5412, ¶ 79 (board failed to comply with R.C. 121.22(G)(8)(a) and (b) when meeting minutes reflected merely that the board moved into executive session “to discuss economic development assistance concerning” a development contract).

¹¹³⁶ *R.C. 121.22(J)*.

¹¹³⁷ *R.C. 121.22(G)*.

¹¹³⁸ *R.C. 121.22(G)*.

¹¹³⁹ *R.C. 121.22(G)*. NOTE: to consider confidential business information of an application for economic development assistance under R.C. 121.22(G)(8), the motion must be approved by a unanimous quorum. *R.C. 121.22(G)(8)(b)*.

¹¹⁴⁰ *R.C. 121.22(G)(1), (8)*.

¹¹⁴¹ *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 59 (2001).

¹¹⁴² *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 59 (2001) (using general terms like “personnel” instead of one or more of the specified statutory purposes is a violation of R.C. 121.22(G)(1)); *Jones v. Brookfield Twp. Trustees*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 92-T-4692, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 2805, *8 (June 30, 1995) (“[A] reference to ‘police personnel issues’ does not technically satisfy [the R.C. 121.22(G)(1)] requirement because it does not specify which of the approved purposes was applicable in this instance.”).

¹¹⁴³ *R.C. 121.22(G)(1)*; *Beisel v. Monroe Cty. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Columbiana No. CA-678, 1990 Ohio App. LEXIS 3761 (Aug. 29, 1990).

¹¹⁴⁴ *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 59 (2001); *State ex rel. Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. of Comms.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2019-P-0015, 2019-Ohio-3729, ¶ 63.

¹¹⁴⁵ *State ex rel. Hicks v. Clermont Cty. Bd. Of Comms.*, 171 Ohio St.3d 593, 2022-Ohio-4237, ¶ 34-36 (public body need not discuss every single topic included in the executive-session motion during executive session).

¹¹⁴⁶ *R.C. 121.22(G)*.

¹¹⁴⁷ *R.C. 121.22(G)*; 1988 Ohio Atty.Gen.Ops. No. 029; *State ex rel. MORE Bratenahl v. Bratenahl*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 105281, 2017-Ohio-8484, ¶ 29 (finding evidence in the record and on audio recording of the village council meeting that a roll call vote that took place before the council went in to executive session was sufficient to show compliance with the Open Meetings Act, even though the roll call vote technically took place before the court reporter began recording the transcript), *rev’d on other grounds*, 157 Ohio St.3d 309, 2019-Ohio-3233.

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Chapter Eleven: Enforcement & Remedies

XI. Chapter Eleven: Enforcement and Remedies

The Open Meetings Act is a “self-help” statute. This means that if any person believes a public body has violated or intends to violate the Open Meetings Act, that person may file suit in a common pleas court to enforce the law’s provisions.¹¹⁴⁸ A person does not need to ask a public official (such as the Ohio Attorney General) to initiate legal action on their behalf, and no state or local government official has the authority to enforce the Act.

The Open Meetings Act states that its provisions “shall be liberally construed to require public officials to take official action and to conduct all deliberations upon official business only in open meetings unless the subject matter is specifically excepted by law.”¹¹⁴⁹ The executive session exemptions contained in R.C. 121.22(G) are to be strictly construed.¹¹⁵⁰

A. Enforcement

1. Injunction

Any person may file a court action for an injunction to address an alleged or threatened violation of the Open Meetings Act. This action must be “brought within two years after the date of the alleged violation or threatened violation.”¹¹⁵¹ There must still be an actual, genuine controversy at the time the action is filed, or the claim may be dismissed as moot.¹¹⁵² If granted by a court, an injunction compels the members of the public body to comply with the law by either refraining from the prohibited behavior or by lawfully conducting their meetings when they previously failed to do so. If the court finds multiple violations of the Open Meetings Act through the same conduct, the court may issue a single injunction for the multiple violations.¹¹⁵³

a. Who may file and against whom

“Any person” has standing to file for an injunction to enforce the Open Meetings Act.¹¹⁵⁴ The person need not demonstrate a personal stake in the outcome of the lawsuit.¹¹⁵⁵

Open Meetings Act injunction actions sometimes include the public body as the defendant, or individual members of the public body, or both. No reported cases dispute that individual members of a public body are proper defendants, but some courts have held that the public body itself is not “sui juris” (capable of being sued) for violations of the Act.¹¹⁵⁶ Other courts find that public bodies are “sui juris” for purposes of suits alleging violations of the Act.¹¹⁵⁷ Persons filing an enforcement action should consult case law applicable to their appellate district.

b. Where to file

The Open Meetings Act requires that an action for injunction be filed in the court of common pleas in the county where the alleged violation took place.¹¹⁵⁸

Appellate courts disagree on whether an injunction action must be filed as a separate original action or whether it may be brought with a related lawsuit. One court found that a party may not assert an alleged violation of the Open Meetings Act in a related action before a county board of elections.¹¹⁵⁹ Courts have reached different conclusions as to whether a court may consider an alleged violation of the Act as a claim made within an administrative appeal.¹¹⁶⁰ Those cases finding no jurisdiction have reasoned that the exclusive method to enforce the Act is as a separate original action filed in the common pleas court.

c. Proving a violation

The person filing an action under the Open Meetings Act generally has the burden of proving the alleged violation, even if the alleged violation occurred during an executive session.¹¹⁶¹ Absent

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evidence to the contrary, courts will presume that public officers properly performed their duties and acted lawfully.¹¹⁶² Thus, courts should presume that a public body in executive session discussed the topics stated in its motion to enter executive session.¹¹⁶³ However, courts do not necessarily accept a public body's stated purpose for an executive session if other evidence demonstrates that the public body improperly deliberated during the executive session.¹¹⁶⁴ Upon proof of a violation or threatened violation of the Act, the court will conclusively and irrebuttably presume harm and prejudice to the person who brought the suit¹¹⁶⁵ and will issue an injunction.¹¹⁶⁶

d. Curing a violation

Once a violation is proven, the court must grant the injunction, regardless of the public body's subsequent attempts to cure the violation.¹¹⁶⁷ Courts have different views as to whether and how a public body can then cure the violation, for instance with new, compliant discussions followed by compliant formal action.¹¹⁶⁸ One court explained that after a violation a public body must "start its decision-making process over with regard to what was illegally deliberated or decided in a closed meeting."¹¹⁶⁹ The Supreme Court of Ohio held that a city's failure to have public deliberation regarding the adoption of a charter amendment was cured when the amendment was placed on the ballot and adopted by the electorate.¹¹⁷⁰

2. Mandamus

When a person seeks access to the public body's minutes, that person may also file a mandamus action under the Public Records Act to compel the creation of or access to meeting minutes.¹¹⁷¹ Mandamus is also the appropriate action to order a public body to give notice of meetings to the person filing the action.¹¹⁷²

3. Quo warranto

Once a court issues an injunction finding a violation of the Open Meetings Act, members of the public body who later commit a "knowing" violation of the injunction may be removed from office through a *quo warranto* action, which may only be brought by the county prosecutor or the Ohio Attorney General.¹¹⁷³

B. Remedies

1. Invalidity

A resolution, rule, or formal action of any kind is invalid unless a public body adopts it in an open meeting.¹¹⁷⁴ However, courts have refused to allow public bodies to benefit from their own violations of the Open Meetings Act.¹¹⁷⁵ For instance, a public body may not attempt to avoid a contractual obligation by arguing that approval of the contract is invalid because of a violation of the Act.¹¹⁷⁶

a. Failure to take formal action in public

The Open Meetings Act requires a public body to take all "official" or "formal" action in open session.¹¹⁷⁷ Even without taking a vote or a poll, members of a public body may inadvertently take "formal action" in an executive session when they indicate how they intend to vote about a matter pending before them, making the later vote in open session invalid.¹¹⁷⁸ A formal action taken in an open session also may be invalid if it results from deliberations that improperly occurred outside of an open meeting, e.g., at an informal, private meeting or in an improper executive session.¹¹⁷⁹ Even a decision in executive session not to take action (on a request made to the public body) has been held to be "formal action" that should have been made in open session, and thus, was deemed invalid.¹¹⁸⁰

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b. Improper notice

When a public body takes formal action in a meeting for which it did not properly give notice, the action is invalid.¹¹⁸¹

c. Minutes

At least one court has found that minutes are merely the record of actions; they are not actions in and of themselves.¹¹⁸² Thus, failure to properly approve minutes does not invalidate the actions taken during the meeting.¹¹⁸³

2. Mandatory civil forfeiture

If the court issues an injunction, the court will order the public body to pay a civil forfeiture of \$500 to the person who filed the action.¹¹⁸⁴ Courts that find that a public body has violated the law on repeated occasions have awarded a \$500 civil forfeiture for each violation.¹¹⁸⁵ However, if multiple violations through the same conduct are found, the court may issue a single injunction, and order the public body to pay a single \$500 civil forfeiture penalty as to all offenses.¹¹⁸⁶

3. Court costs and attorney fees

If the court issues an injunction, it will order the public body to pay all court costs¹¹⁸⁷ and the reasonable attorney fees of the person who filed the action.¹¹⁸⁸ Courts have discretion to reduce or completely eliminate attorney fees, however, if they find that, (1) based on the state of the law when the violation occurred, a well-informed public body could have reasonably believed it was not violating the law; and (2) it was reasonable for the public body to believe its actions served public policy.¹¹⁸⁹

If the court does not issue an injunction and decides the lawsuit was frivolous, the court will order the person who filed the suit to pay all the public body's court costs and reasonable attorney fees as determined by the court.¹¹⁹⁰ A public body is entitled to attorney fees even when those fees are paid by its insurance company.¹¹⁹¹

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Notes:

¹¹⁴⁸ R.C. 121.22(I)(1).

¹¹⁴⁹ R.C. 121.22(A).

¹¹⁵⁰ *State ex rel. Hardin v. Clermont Cty. Bd. of Elections*, 12th Dist. Clermont Nos. CA2011-05-045, CA2011-06-047, 2012-Ohio-2569, ¶ 15; *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 17.

¹¹⁵¹ R.C. 121.22(I)(1); see also *Mollette v. Portsmouth City Council*, 179 Ohio App.3d 455, 2008-Ohio-6342 (4th Dist.); *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 16.

¹¹⁵² *Tucker v. Leadership Academy*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 14AP-100, 2014-Ohio-3307, ¶ 14-17 (finding closure of charter school rendered allegedly improper resolution under Open Meetings Act moot); *State ex rel. Crilley v. Lowellville Bd. of Educ.*, 7th Dist. Mahoning No. 20 MA 0128, 2021-Ohio-3333 (Open Meetings Act challenge based on school board's reopening plan was moot by the end of the school year).

¹¹⁵³ *Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 172 Ohio St.3d 1, 2022-Ohio-4605, ¶ 21.

¹¹⁵⁴ R.C. 121.22(I)(1); *McVey v. Carthage Twp. Trustees*, 4th Dist. Athens No. 04CA44, 2005-Ohio-2869.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 153 Ohio App.3d 499, 2003-Ohio-4084, ¶ 20 (2d Dist.); *State ex rel. Mason v. State Employment Relations Bd.*, 133 Ohio App.3d 213 (10th Dist. 1999). But see *Korchnak v. Civil Serv. Comm. of Canton*, 5th Dist. Stark No. CA-8133, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 291, *5 (Jan. 7, 1991) (finding a party did not have standing to challenge a public body's failure to provide requested notices of meetings when he had not followed procedures entitling him to notice).

¹¹⁵⁶ *Mollette v. Portsmouth City Council*, 169 Ohio App.3d 557, 2006-Ohio-6289 (4th Dist.) (finding suit should have been filed against the individual council members in their official capacities).

¹¹⁵⁷ *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 10-14; *Krueck v. Kipton Village Council*, 9th Dist. Lorain No. 11CA009960, 2012-Ohio-1787, ¶ 3-4, 16; *State ex rel. Maynard v. Medina Cty. Facilities Taskforce Subcomm.*, 9th Dist. Medina No. 19CA0083-M, 2020-Ohio-5561, ¶ 18-21 (finding that subcommittee is *sui juris* even though it is not a "decision-making body" and does not have "decision-making authority"; while individual subcommittee members were also sued, they were not necessarily parties).

¹¹⁵⁸ R.C. 121.22(I)(1).

¹¹⁵⁹ *State ex rel. Savko & Sons v. Perry Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 10th Dist. Franklin No. 14AP-204, 2014-Ohio-1181.

¹¹⁶⁰ Courts finding jurisdiction: *Brenneman Bros. v. Allen Cty. Commrs.*, 3d Dist. Allen No. 1-13-14, 2013-Ohio-4635; *Hardesty v. River View Local School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 63 Ohio Misc.2d 145 (C.P. 1993). Courts finding no jurisdiction: *Stainfield v. Jefferson Emergency Rescue District*, 11th Dist. Ashtabula No. 2009-A-0044, 2010-Ohio-2282; *Fahl v. Athens*, 4th Dist. Athens No. 06CA23, 2007-Ohio-4925; *Pfeffer v. Bd. of Cty. Commrs. of Portage Cty.*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2000-P-0030, 2001 Ohio App. LEXIS 3185 (July 13, 2001).

¹¹⁶¹ *State ex rel. Hicks v. Clermont Cty. Bd. Of Commrs.*, 171 Ohio St.3d 593, 2022-Ohio-4237, ¶ 40 ("Plaintiffs alleging violations of Ohio's OMA, R.C. 121.22, bear the burden of proving the violations they have alleged"); *Paridon v. Trumbull Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 2012-T-0035, 2013-Ohio-881, ¶ 18 (requiring proof by clear and convincing evidence); *State ex rel. Masiella v. Brimfield Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 2016-P-0038, 2017-Ohio-2934, ¶ 53 (finding appellant failed to meet this burden, which required him "to demonstrate that a meeting occurred . . . [and] that a public action resulted from a deliberation in the meeting that was not open to the public").

¹¹⁶² *State ex rel. Hicks v. Clermont Cty. Bd. Of Commrs.*, 171 Ohio St.3d 593, 2022-Ohio-4237, ¶ 21.

¹¹⁶³ *State ex rel. Hicks v. Clermont Cty. Bd. Of Commrs.*, 171 Ohio St.3d 593, 2022-Ohio-4237, ¶ 21; *Armatas v. Plain Twp.*, 5th Dist. Stark No. 2022 CA 00039, 2023-Ohio-204, ¶ 59 (plaintiff failed to present evidence of the public body's improper deliberations during secret meeting), *discretionary appeal not allowed*, 170 Ohio St.3d 1480, 2023-Ohio-2236.

¹¹⁶⁴ *Sea Lakes, Inc. v. Lipstreu*, 11th Dist. Portage No. 90-P-2254, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 4615, *12 (Sept. 30, 1991) (finding a violation when board was to discuss administrative appeal merits privately, appellant's attorney objected, board immediately held executive session "to discuss possible legal actions", then emerged to announce decision on appeal); *In the Matter of Removal of Smith*, 5th Dist. Morgan No. CA-90-11, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 2409, *2 (May 15, 1991) (county commission violated the Open Meetings Act when it emerged from executive session held "to discuss legal matters" and announced decision to remove Smith from Board of Mental Health; no county attorney was present in executive session, and a request for public hearing on removal decision was pending).

¹¹⁶⁵ R.C. 121.22(I)(3).

¹¹⁶⁶ R.C. 121.22(I)(1); see also *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 153 Ohio App.3d 499, 2003-Ohio-4084, ¶ 21 (2d Dist.) (statute's provision that an injunction is mandatory upon finding violation is not an unconstitutional violation of separation of powers); *Fayette Volunteer Fire Dept. No. 2, Inc. v. Fayette Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 87 Ohio App.3d 51, 54 (4th Dist. 1993) (finding injunction mandatory even though challenged board action was nullified and there was no need for an injunction).

¹¹⁶⁷ *McVey v. Carthage Twp. Trustees*, 4th Dist. Athens No. 04CA44, 2005-Ohio-2869, ¶ 9 ("Because the statute clearly provides that an injunction is to be issued upon finding a violation of the Sunshine Law, it is irrelevant that the Trustees nullified their prior [offending] action.").

¹¹⁶⁸ Courts finding that violation was not cured: *Keystone Comm. v. Switzerland of Ohio School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. No. 15 MO 0011, 2016-Ohio-4663, ¶ 44-46 (a public body cannot "cure" a violation by simply voting again on the same information improperly obtained in executive session); *Wheeling Corp. v. Columbus & Ohio River R.R. Co.*, 147 Ohio App.3d 460, 476 (10th Dist. 2001) (no cure of violation by conducting an open meeting prior to taking formal action); *M.F. Waste Ventures, Inc. v. Bd. of Amanda Twp. Trustees*, 3d Dist. No. 1-87-46, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 493, *9 (Feb. 12, 1988) (based on violation "the resolutions were invalid, and the fact that they were later adopted at public meetings did not cure their invalidity"); *Gannett Satellite Information Network, Inc. v. Chillicothe City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 41 Ohio App.3d 218, 221 (4th Dist. 1988) ("A violation of the Sunshine Law cannot be 'cured' by subsequent open meetings if the public body initially discussed matters in executive session that should have been discussed before the public."). Courts finding violation was cured: *Kuhlman v. Leipsic*, 3d Dist. Putnam No. 12-94-9, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 1269, *8 (Mar. 27, 1995) ("[A]n initial failure to comply with R.C. 121.22 can be cured if the matter at issue is later placed before the public for consideration."); *Beisel v. Monroe Cty. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Monroe No. CA-678, 1990 Ohio App. LEXIS 3761, *6-7 (Aug. 29, 1990) (discussing a permitted matter in executive session, without a proper motion, was cured by rescinding the resulting action and then conducting the action in compliance with the Open Meetings Act).

¹¹⁶⁹ *Danis Montco Landfill Co. v. Jefferson Twp. Zoning Comm.*, 85 Ohio App.3d 494, 501 (2d Dist. 1993); see also *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 36 (finding Open Meetings Act violation in termination of an employee did not afford employee lifetime employment but the public body must re-deliberate "at least enough to support a finding that its discharge decision did not result from prior improper deliberations").

¹¹⁷⁰ *Fox v. Lakewood*, 39 Ohio St.3d 19 (1998); see also *Skindell v. Madigan*, 8th Dist. Cuyahoga No. 103976, 2017-Ohio-398, ¶ 5.

¹¹⁷¹ *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54 (2001) (once a public body's minutes are prepared, the Public Records Act requires the public body to permit access to the minutes upon request); *Ames v. Portage Cty. Bd. Commrs.*, S.Ct. No. 2022-0148, 2023-Ohio-3382 (finding that when the public body violated the Open Meetings Act in failing to prepare full and accurate minutes, the relator also established a violation of the Public Records Act).

¹¹⁷² *State ex rel. Vindicator Printing Co. v. Kirila*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 91-T-4550, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 6413 (Dec. 31, 1991).

¹¹⁷³ R.C. 121.22(I)(4); R.C. Chapter 2733 (quo warranto); *State ex rel. Bates v. Smith*, 147 Ohio St.3d 322, 2016-Ohio-5449 (granting quo warranto to remove township trustee from office because trustees unlawfully voted to declare that position vacant when officeholder was on active military

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service); *State ex rel. Newell v. Jackson*, 118 Ohio St.3d 138, 2008-Ohio-1965, ¶ 8-14 (to be entitled to a writ of *quo warranto* to oust a good-faith appointee, a relator must either file a *quo warranto* action or an injunction challenging the appointment before the appointee completes the probationary period and becomes a permanent employee; this duty applies to alleged violations of the Open Meetings Act); *Randles v. Hill*, 66 Ohio St.3d 32 (1993) (granting writ of *quo warranto* reinstating petitioner when vote to remove him was made at a meeting where the public was inadvertently excluded); *McClarren v. Alliance*, 5th Dist. Stark No. CA-7201, 1987 Ohio App. LEXIS 9211 (Oct. 13, 1987) (finding that an injunction must be issued upon the finding of a violation to allow for removal from office after any future knowing violation).

¹¹⁷⁴ R.C. 121.22(H).

¹¹⁷⁵ *Jones v. Brookfield Twp. Trustees*, 11th Dist. Trumbull No. 92-T-4692, 1995 Ohio App. LEXIS 2805 (June 30, 1995); *Roberto v. Brown Cty. Gen. Hosp.*, 12th Dist. Brown No. CA87-06-009, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 372 (Feb. 8, 1988).

¹¹⁷⁶ *Roberto v. Brown Cty. Gen. Hosp.*, 12th Dist. Brown No. CA87-06-009, 1988 Ohio App. LEXIS 372 (Feb. 8, 1988).

¹¹⁷⁷ R.C. 121.22(A), (C), and (H).

¹¹⁷⁸ *Piekutowski v. S. Cent. Ohio Edn. Serv. Ctr. Governing Bd.*, 161 Ohio App.3d 372, 2005-Ohio-2868, ¶ 19 (4th Dist.) (finding that resolution to adopt proposal was invalid; even though it was adopted in open session, board members gave personal opinions and indicated how they would vote in resolution in an executive session); *Keystone Comm. v. Switzerland of Ohio School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Monroe No. 15 MO 0011, 2016-Ohio-4663, ¶ 37-39 (finding an attempt to “cure” a violation “with an open vote that immediately followed presentations and discussions held behind closed doors in executive sessions is exactly the type of conduct the Act seeks to prohibit”); *Mathews v. E. Local School Dist.*, 4th Dist. Pike No. 00CA647, 2001 Ohio App. LEXIS 1677 (Jan. 4, 2001) (board was permitted to discuss employee grievance in executive session, but was required to take formal action by voting in an open meeting); *State ex rel. Kinsley v. Berea Bd. of Edn.*, 64 Ohio App.3d 659, 664 (8th Dist. 1990) (once a conclusion is reached regarding pending or imminent litigation, the conclusion is to be made public, even though the deliberations leading to the conclusion were private).

¹¹⁷⁹ R.C. 121.22(H); *Keystone Comm. v. Switzerland of Ohio School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Monroe No. 15 MO 0011, 2016-Ohio-4663, ¶ 30-31 (action by the public body that resulted from improper discussion in executive session was invalid); *Mansfield City Council v. Richland Cty. Council AFL-CIO*, 5th Dist. Richland No. 03 CA 55, 2003 Ohio App. LEXIS 6654 (Dec. 24, 2003) (finding council reached its conclusion based on comments in executive session and acted according to that conclusion).

¹¹⁸⁰ *Mansfield City Council v. Richland Cty. Council AFL-CIO*, 5th Dist. Richland No. 03 CA 55, 2003 Ohio App. LEXIS 6654 (Dec. 24, 2003).

¹¹⁸¹ R.C. 121.22(H). *But see* *Hoops v. Jerusalem Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. L-97-1240, 1998 Ohio App. LEXIS 1496, *10-11 (Apr. 10, 1998) (illustrating that actions are not invalid merely because a reasonable method of notice had not been enacted by “rule”); *Keystone Comm. v. Switzerland of Ohio School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 7th Dist. Monroe No. 15 MO 0011, 2016-Ohio-4663, ¶ 35-36 (finding notice of special meeting “to discuss the 2015-2016 school year” was not specific enough to meeting’s purpose to discuss a school closure); *Barbeck v. Twinsburg Twp.*, 73 Ohio App.3d 587 (9th Dist. 1992); *Huth v. Bolivar*, 5th Dist. Tuscarawas No. 2014 AP 02 0005, 2014-Ohio-4889, ¶ 20-23 (holding that, even if notice was flawed, the second reading of a proposed ordinance was not “formal action”).

¹¹⁸² *Davidson v. Hanging Rock*, 97 Ohio App.3d 723, 733 (4th Dist. 1994).

¹¹⁸³ *Davidson v. Hanging Rock*, 97 Ohio App.3d 723, 733 (4th Dist. 1994).

¹¹⁸⁴ R.C. 121.22(I)(2)(a). *But see* *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 32 (2013) (declining to award civil forfeiture damages and attorney fees when case was filed as mandamus action in the court of appeals instead of a request for an injunction in the court of common pleas).

¹¹⁸⁵ *Specht v. Finnegan*, 6th Dist. Lucas No. 2-02-1012, 2002-Ohio-4660; *Manogg v. Stickle*, 5th Dist. Licking No. 98CA00102, 1999 Ohio App. LEXIS 1488 (Mar. 15, 1999); *Weisbarth v. Geauga Park Dist.*, 11th Dist. No. 2007-G-2780, 2007-Ohio-6728, ¶ 30 (holding that the only violation alleged was board’s failure to state a precise statutory reason for going into executive session and that this “technical” violation entitled appellant to only one statutory injunction and one civil forfeiture”); *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013 CA 38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 40-51 (stacking forfeitures for certain violations but not others). *But see* *Doran v. Northmont Bd. of Edn.*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 19956, 2003-Ohio-7097, ¶ 18, n.3 (determining that the failure to adopt rule is one violation with one \$500 fine; fine is not assessed for each meeting conducted in absence of rule where meetings were, in fact, properly noticed and held in an open forum).

¹¹⁸⁶ *Ames v. Rootstown Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 172 Ohio St.3d 1, 2022-Ohio-4605, ¶ 21.

¹¹⁸⁷ R.C. 121.22(I)(2)(a).

¹¹⁸⁸ R.C. 121.22(I)(2)(a); *State ex rel. Long v. Cardington Village Council*, 92 Ohio St.3d 54, 60 (2001) and 93 Ohio St.3d 1230 (2001) (awarding a citizen over \$17,000 in attorney fees); *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 60 (“[T]he OMA is structured such that an injunction follows a violation and attorney fees follow an injunction.”); *But see* *State ex rel. Dunlap v. Violet Twp. Bd. of Trustees*, 5th Dist. Fairfield No. 12-CA-8, 2013-Ohio-2295, ¶ 32 (2013) (declining to award civil forfeiture damages and attorney fees when case was filed as mandamus action in the court of appeals instead of a request for an injunction in the court of common pleas).

¹¹⁸⁹ R.C. 121.22(I)(2)(a)(i), (ii); *Maddox v. Greene Cty. Children Servs. Bd. of Dirs.*, 2d Dist. Greene No. 2013-CA-38, 2014-Ohio-2312, ¶ 61-62 (trial court could reasonably conclude that a well-informed public body would know that it must be specific when giving a reason for executive session, and that it cannot vote in executive session); *Mathews v. E. Local School Dist.*, 4th Dist. Pike No. 00CA647, 2001 Ohio App. LEXIS 1677 (Jan. 4, 2001) (the board was not entitled to reduction when two board members knew not to take formal action during executive session); *State ex rel. Jones v. Bd. of Edn. of Dayton Pub. Schs.*, 2d Dist. Montgomery No. 28637, 2020-Ohio-4931, ¶ 61-62, 71 (awarding attorney fees because no well-informed board would believe it could publish a misleading notice of a special meeting or alter a published agenda after meeting; whether public body’s actions were “egregious” or benefited the public is irrelevant).

¹¹⁹⁰ R.C. 121.22(I)(2)(b); *McIntyre v. Westerville City School Dist. Bd. of Edn.*, 10th Dist. Franklin Nos. 90AP-1024, 90AP-1063, 1991 Ohio App. LEXIS 2658, at *9 (June 6, 1991) (finding a plaintiff engaged in frivolous conduct because her actions subjected the board to a baseless suit and the incurring of needless expense); *State ex rel. Chrisman v. Clearcreek Twp.*, 12th Dist. Warren No. CA2013-03-025, 2014-Ohio-252, ¶ 19 (upholding award of attorney fees when “there was no possible violation of the OMA as alleged in Relator’s first four allegations”).

¹¹⁹¹ *State ex rel. Chrisman v. Clearcreek Twp.*, 12th Dist. Warren No. CA2013-03-025, 2014-Ohio-252, ¶ 23.

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