



# Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition

4075 Linglestown Rd. #312, Harrisburg, PA 17112-1020

www.pafoic.org

## A QUICK GUIDE TO PENNSYLVANIA'S NEW OPEN RECORDS LAW

Effective January 1, 2009

Updated 9/10

**Does the new law cover records created before January 1, 2009?** Yes. All records in the possession of an agency are covered after Jan. 1, 2009, even if they are decades old.

**What is the single biggest change under the new law?** Agencies now have the burden to establish why a record should not be released. The old law put the burden on a requester to establish why a record was public.

**What else has changed?** The law begins with the presumption that all records held by state and local agencies are publicly available, both for viewing and copying. Likewise, all *financial* records held by judicial agencies (courts) and all *legislative* records held by the General Assembly (the state Senate and House of Representatives and a stated number of legislative committees and commissions) are available.

**Does that mean I can see any and all records?** No. Although there is a presumption that all records are open, the law contains 30 categories of records that are exempt from disclosure, including records that, if disclosed, would threaten homeland security or a person's personal security, criminal investigative records, medical records, and certain personnel records. (*See list of exemptions on Page 6.*)

**Does the open records law always apply?** No. The open records law does not apply to records that are either protected by a privilege (such as attorney-client or doctor-patient), or that fall under another state or federal law or regulation, or a judicial order. If another law says that a record is public or not public, the other law applies.

**What kinds of records are covered by other laws?** Criminal and civil court records, birth and death records, and voter registration records are made public by other laws. Police blotter and incident reports are made publicly available under the Criminal History Record Information Act. Autopsy reports are made available under the Coroner's Act. Birth records are released according to the Vital Statistics Law. There also are laws protecting social service and medical records. These are just some examples.

**If a record is exempt from disclosure under the open records law, does that mean it can't be released?** No. The list of exemptions determines what records legally *may* be withheld, it does not say those records *must* be withheld. There is a provision giving agencies the discretion to release records if the public interest in disclosure outweighs any need for confidentiality. (And if another law or privilege doesn't apply.)

For example: The new law exempts the names of minors from disclosure. However, the public interest in knowing the names of students on high school honor rolls, graduation lists, football teams, etc. means most school districts continue to release these names.

**What about the records of private companies doing government work?** The law provides access to public records in the possession of contractors performing "governmental functions" on behalf of a state or local agency. Only those records which directly relate to that governmental function are available. Request these kinds of records from the government agency, not the contractor.

**What if a public record has some non-public information in it, like a Social Security number?** The law requires the record to be released, with the non-public information stricken out – "redacted."

**Are e-mails and tape recordings public record?** Yes. That does not mean there is wholesale release of e-mail records or tapes. It means that an e-mail or tape, like any other record, goes through the same analysis to determine whether it is a public record. It's not the format of the record that counts – it's what kind of information it contains.

## THE REQUEST PROCESS

**How can I request information from a local government or state agency?** You may make a request four ways: mail, fax, e-mail or in person. The request must be sufficiently “specific” to allow the public agency to identify what you are seeking.

**Where do I send my request?** The request should be addressed to the agency’s open records officer. Each agency must have someone designated to this position. Information must be posted at the agency’s office, and posted on the agency’s website, if it has one.

You may also consult the Office of Open Records website <http://openrecords.state.pa.us>, which maintains a registry of open records officers across the state, with name, address, phone, fax and e-mail address.

**Is there a form I can use to obtain records?** Yes, a standard request form is available from the state Office of Open Records website at <http://openrecords.state.pa.us>. [Also printed on Page 9.] A local or commonwealth agency may use its own form, but it also must accept the Office of Open Records Request form if you want to use it. Legislative and judicial agencies may develop their own forms. *Always keep a copy of the form for your records.*

**Can I ask for records in person?** Yes. However, if you wish to take advantage of the appeal process in case you are denied, the request must be in writing, so you are advised to use a form unless you are making a very routine request that you expect to be fulfilled while you wait.

**Can I make a request by e-mail?** Yes. The law requires public agencies to accept requests made by e-mail.

**Must I explain why I want the information?** No. The law prohibits a public body from *requiring* anyone “to disclose the purpose or motive in requesting access to records.” Requesters should understand, however, that agencies may need to ask some questions in order to understand exactly what records you are looking for and to help fulfill your request. So agencies may ask ... but you are not obligated to tell.

**Can a public body limit the number of requests that a citizen can make?** No. The law states that a state or local agency cannot limit “the number of records which may be requested or made available for inspection or duplication.” However, citizens should use good judgment in seeking records from the public body and not use this law to harass or overburden a public body from performing its job. Also, a public body can deny repeated requests for the *same* records by the same requester.

**Can a request be denied because the requester is not a citizen of Pennsylvania?** No. Any legal resident of the United States can request a record, including a person with a green card.

**How long does an agency have to respond?** All agencies now have five business days to answer your request. (The first of those days is the first business day *after* your request is received.) Under certain circumstances — such as when legal review or redaction are necessary, or the records are stored in a remote spot, or when the request is extensive — an agency may take up to 30 additional days. But it still must respond within five business days, notifying you of the time extension.

**What if I don’t hear back from them within the time limit?** First, make sure the agency has received your request. It is a good idea to follow through after your request is submitted to make sure it has been received. Second, make sure you allow enough time for a response to reach you by mail. (The initial response must be *sent* by the fifth business day, not *received* by you by that date.). If you truly do not get a response, then your request is “deemed denied,” and you may file an appeal. It is important that you put your request in writing, and that you keep a copy of the request, so you have documentation of when the request was made.

## THE APPEAL PROCESS

**How do I file an appeal?** If your request or part of your request is denied by a local or state agency (or “deemed denied” by lack of a timely response), you may appeal to the Office of Open Records, using the form available on its website. You must file the appeal within 15 business days of the mailing date of the denial, and your appeal must explain why you believe the record you requested is a public record. Also address any grounds the agency provided for delaying or denying your request. *See the Office of Open Records website for full instructions.*

**What about appeals to the attorney general, state treasurer and auditor general?** Under the law, the offices of these three state officials designate their own appeals officers. Check their websites for information.

**What about appeals to legislative agencies?** The state Senate and state House of Representatives each appoint their own appeals officers. All other legislative agency appeals are heard by an appeals officer designated by the Legislative Reference Bureau.

**What about appeals on requests for law enforcement records?** Local district attorneys designate their own appeals officers relating to criminal investigative records in possession of a local agency of that county.

**How does the Office of Open Records appeal process work?** Once an appeal is submitted to the Office of Open Records, with all the pertinent paper work, the OOR has 30 calendar days to respond with a final determination. It may seek additional information, or it may make a decision based simply on the information provided. It may also conduct a hearing, although the OOR has expressed its desire to handle most appeals based on the information provided.

**Is there some sort of mediation process?** Yes. The Office of Open Records has established an informal mediation process that is available if both the requester and the agency agree to take part by signing Informal Mediation Request Forms. The OOR mediation process is available only after a formal appeal has been filed. The intent is to bring the parties into agreement without the OOR having to issue a final determination.

**How does the mediation process work?** Both parties must agree to at least one mediation session. Mediation sessions are not open to the public, but if resolution is reached, the outcome will be made public. If the mediation is successful, the requester must withdraw the appeal. If it is not successful, the Office of Open Records has 30 calendar days from the end of the mediation process to issue a final determination on the case.

**Are the final determinations of the Office of Open Records binding?** Yes. However, the OOR has no power to enforce.

**What if I disagree with the Office of Open Records (or other appeals officer) determination?** If a requester OR an agency wants to appeal a ruling by the Office of Open Records or other appeals officer, the appeal must be filed in court within 30 days of the mailing of the final determination. Commonwealth agency cases should be appealed in Commonwealth Court. Local agency cases should be appealed to the local Court of Common Pleas.

#### FEES

**Can a state agency or local agency charge me for copying records?** Yes. The Office of Open Records has established that these agencies may charge a maximum of 25 cents per page. (“Page” meaning one side of a standard 8.5 x 11 black and white sheet.) The OOR is to review the fee structure every six months.

Agencies may charge actual costs for providing copies of specialized documents such as blueprints, color copies, non-standard sized documents. And they may also collect from you the actual cost of postage if the records are to be mailed to you.

If a separate law authorizes an agency to charge a set amount for a certain type of record, the agency may charge no more than that amount. (For instance, a Recorder of Deeds may charge 50 cents per uncertified page and \$1.50 per certified page, and police departments have the authority to charge up to \$15 for a copy of a vehicle accident report, both under separate laws.)

**Can a state agency or local agency charge additional fees?** Generally, no. The law states that, “except as otherwise provided by statute, no other fees may be imposed unless the agency necessarily incurs costs for complying with the request, and such fees must be reasonable. No fee may be imposed for an agency’s review of a record to determine whether the record is a public record, legislative record or financial record subject to access in accordance with this act.”

**So a state or local agency can’t charge me for the time it takes to fulfill my request?** The Office of Open Records has established that no fee may be charged for searching for or retrieval of documents, and that an agency may not charge staff time or salary for complying with a RTK request.

**Can they make me pre-pay?** Agencies may require prepayment (payment before they begin filling the request) only when fees are expected to exceed \$100. However, once document copies have been made and are ready, agencies may require payment before turning them over to you.

**What about fees for obtaining a copy of a database?** Agencies are permitted to charge fees based on the “reasonable market value” for “complex and extensive datasets,” such as geographic information systems (GIS) databases or integrated property assessment list databases. The increased fee provisions do not apply to media requesters or to nonprofit organizations conducting educational research.

## FORMAT OF RECORDS

**Can I get an electronic copy of a public record? Or a copy of a tape recording?** If the record already exists in the medium you request, the agency must make it available to you that way. Duplicating costs may apply, such as the cost of a blank disc or the cost to make a copy of a tape recording at an outside vendor. If a record only exists on paper, however, the agency is not required to scan it into a computer format for you. (But you may always ask.)

**What if I want a printout, not an electronic copy of a record?** If a record is maintained *only* in a computer, agencies *must* make you a paper copy if you request it that way. Paper is always an option.

**Can I get information I'm looking for just the way I want it?** You should ask if the agency can accommodate any such requests you have — for instance, it may be just as easy for them to print a spreadsheet sorted by one specific field as another. But agencies are not required to “create” a record if none exists or to “compile, maintain, format or organize” a record in a way in which it does not already do so.

Example: You want to know the attendance records of each township supervisor at board meetings for the past year. The township does not have to create an attendance report for you, if it doesn't already have one. However, since attendance must be noted on meeting minutes, it can provide you with copies of all the minutes for the year in question, so you may compile the information yourself.

**Can I use the open records law to make an agency tell me what I want to know?** The open records law deals only with public access to documents, and you may only ask for existing records. You cannot use the law to make an agency answer questions or to compile information or reports if they don't already exist.

So when you make a Right to Know Request, make sure you are requesting a document ... not asking questions. Using the example above, for instance, your request might be for “documents showing the attendance of supervisors at township meetings held in 2008.” Do not state “I want to know how many meetings the supervisors attended in 2008.” Do not request “a list of how many meetings the supervisors attended,” unless you know that the township already maintains such a list.

Feel free to ask at the agency office if you need to know what documents would contain the information you seek. Be as specific as you can be, so that the agency knows what you are looking for.

## EXAMPLES UNDER THE NEW LAW

### What are some examples of public records available under the new law?

- 911 time response logs (but not transcripts or recordings)
- Grant applications (not just the contracts reflecting funded grants)
- Contracts – The law establishes an online, searchable database for state contracts
- Agreements
- Agency decisions
- Financial records of all kinds.
- Aggregated data – Databases of information about broad groups or categories, where individuals cannot be identified
- Name, title, salary of public employees and officials
- Itemized bills for publicly-owned cell phones. (Although private telephone numbers must be redacted before the bills are disclosed.)
- Records reflecting a public employee's demotion or discharge.
- Board packets and other documents at the time they are presented to a quorum of the board before a meeting
- Community colleges are now covered agencies, and their records are presumed public.
- State-affiliated universities are now required to publicly disclose certain financial information, including the salaries of all officers and directors and salaries of the highest paid employees.
- The General Assembly is now included as an “agency,” and the law expressly identifies a number of legislative records that are public, including financial records, manuals and written policies, and financial audit reports.

### What are some types of information that are NOT ordinarily available?

- Social Security numbers
- Drivers license numbers
- Employee numbers
- Home, cellular or personal phone numbers
- Personal financial information
- Spouse's name, marital status, beneficiary or dependent information
- Home addresses of law enforcement and judges
- Identity of confidential informants.
- Library circulation cards

- Pre-decisional deliberations
- Autopsy reports – except that name, cause and manner of death, which are public.
- Records that identify social service recipients, including welfare recipients
- A minor’s name, home address, date of birth.
- Constituent requests to a member of the House or Senate

#### FOUR TYPES OF PUBLIC AGENCIES

##### **What agencies are covered by the new open records law?**

There are four types of agencies identified: Commonwealth, local, legislative and judicial.

#### COMMONWEALTH AGENCIES

**What are commonwealth agencies?** All state agencies (such as the Department of Education) are included, and specifically the following:

- The Governor’s office
- Office of Attorney General
- Department of Auditor General
- Treasury Department
- Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (and entities created by PHEAA)
- Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
- Pennsylvania Municipal Retirement Board
- State System of Higher Education (the 14 state-owned universities)
- Community colleges
- Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission
- Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
- Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority
- State Public School Building Authority
- Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association
- Pennsylvania Educational Facilities Authority

And any other state organization established by law that performs or is intended to perform an essential governmental function.

**What are “state-related institutions”?** There is a special chapter of the law relating to these four universities: Temple, University of Pittsburgh, Penn State and Lincoln. These “state-related institutions” are NOT considered commonwealth agencies, and their records are NOT made public under the open records law. However, the law does require these four universities to issue annual public reports that include IRS Form 990 information, plus the salaries of all officers and directors and the highest 25 salaries of other employees. The reports must be filed with the state by May 30 of each year, and the law requires the reports to be made public for seven years on the university’s website, as well as at the university’s library.

#### LOCAL AGENCIES

**What are local agencies?** These include:

- Political subdivisions (Such as public school districts)
- Intermediate units
- Charter schools
- Cyber charter schools
- Public trade or vocational schools
- Local, intergovernmental, regional or municipal governments (such as counties, boroughs and townships)
- Any similar governmental entity.

#### COMMONWEALTH & LOCAL RECORDS

##### **What records can I get from commonwealth and local agencies?**

The law presumes that all records held by all of these agencies are open, both for viewing and copying. The burden of proving that a record is non-public – or that an exemption applies – is on the agency denying access.

The presumption of access doesn’t apply to records that are protected by a legal privilege (such as attorney-client, doctor-patient) or that are exempt from disclosure under another state or federal law or regulation.

There are also 30 categories of records that are exempt from disclosure in the new open records law.

##### **What are the 30 categories of exemptions?**

A summary of the 30 types of records that are exempt from public disclosure follows. Note that commonwealth and local agencies may release these records in many circumstances, and that many of these exemptions do not apply to financial records or aggregated data. The burden of proving that a record is exempt is on the agency receiving the request for the record.

And remember that this is a list of what records a state or local agency *may* legally withhold. It is not a list of what they *must* withhold. Agency heads have the discretion to release records that are exempt if they feel it is in the public interest to do so, as long as disclosure isn't prohibited by another law or court order and as long as the record isn't protected by a legally recognized privilege.

*NOTE: The list of exemptions as well as other parts of the law contain some provisions that are not clearly defined and are subject to interpretation. It will be up to the Office of Open Records and ultimately, the courts, to provide guidance as to how some of the exemptions are to be interpreted. Many of them were still in dispute a year after the law went into effect.*

## THE LAW EXEMPTS THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF RECORDS:

- 1a. Loss of funds:** If disclosed, would result in the loss of federal or state funds
- 1b. Personal security:** If disclosed, would be reasonably likely to result in a substantial and demonstrable risk of physical harm to or the personal security of an individual
- 2. Public safety:** If disclosed, would be reasonably likely to jeopardize homeland security or public safety or preparedness
- 3. Infrastructure security:** If disclosed, would create a reasonable likelihood of endangering the safety or security of a building, public utility, infrastructure, or information storage system
- 4. Computer security:** If disclosed, would be reasonably likely to jeopardize computer security
- 5. Health records:** Medical, psychological and related records that would disclose individually identifiable health information
- 6a. Personal identification information,** including Social Security numbers, personal financial information, driver's license numbers, home, cellular or personal telephone numbers, personal e-mail addresses, employee numbers, other confidential personal identification numbers, a spouse's name, marital status, and beneficiary or dependent information
- 6b. Law enforcement/judicial security:** Home addresses of law enforcement personnel and judges
- 7. Certain personnel records** relating to public employees, including:
  - a. letters of references unless related to an appointment to fill a vacancy in an elected office or an appointed office requiring Senate confirmation;
  - b. performance ratings or reviews;
  - c. state civil service test results and local results if restricted by collective bargaining agreement or if applicant failed;
  - d. applications of those not hired;
  - e. workplace support services program information;
  - f. written criticisms of an employee;
  - g. grievance material;
  - h. information regarding discipline, demotion, or discharge contained in a personnel file. This subparagraph does not apply to the final action of an agency that results in demotion or discharge; and
  - i. academic transcripts.
- 8. Collective bargaining:** Records relating to collective bargaining strategy or negotiations, except that final contracts and agreements and final awards and orders of arbitrators are public
- 9. Drafts** of bills, resolutions, regulations, policies, management directives, and ordinances
- 10. Records reflecting internal, predecisional deliberations** of agencies, including predecisional deliberations relating to a budget recommendation, legislative proposal, or proposed policy, including internal strategies. This exemption does not apply to records reflecting an agency decision, records requesting state funding/grant money, or results of public opinion surveys or polls. In addition, records presented to a quorum of an agency for public deliberation at a meeting subject to the Sunshine Act (e.g., board packets) are public records, unless otherwise exempt under the Act.

11. **Trade secrets** and confidential proprietary information
12. **Notes and working papers** used by a public official or employee solely for personal use
13. **Donations:** Records that would disclose the identity of an agency donor, unless the donation is intended for or restricted to providing remuneration or personal tangible benefit to a named public official or employee of the agency
14. **Unpublished academic materials**
15. **Academic transcripts and examination materials**
16. **Criminal investigative records.** This exemption does not apply to private criminal complaints or to information contained in a police blotter or in a traffic report (except for in-depth accident investigations)
17. **Non-criminal investigative records.** This exemption does not apply to fines levied by agencies, license revocations, settlement agreements, or similar agency actions
18. **911 records**, except that time response logs are public, and agencies can disclose 911 recordings or transcripts if the agency or a court determines that the public interest in disclosure outweighs the interest in nondisclosure
19. **DNA and RNA records**
20. **Autopsy reports**, except that name, cause, and manner of death of a deceased individual are public
21. **Draft minutes** of an agency until the next meeting, and **minutes of an executive session**
22. **Real estate appraisals, environmental reviews, audits or evaluations** relating to an agency's proposed lease, acquisition, or disposal of real property. The exemption no longer applies once the decision to lease, acquire or dispose of the property is made
- 23-24. **Library circulation records and certain archived materials**
25. **Sensitive sites:** Records identifying the location of an archeological site or an endangered or threatened plant or animal species if not already publicly known
26. **Pre-award contract bids:** Proposals relating to agency procurement or disposal of supplies, services or construction prior to the award of the contract or the opening and rejection of all bids; financial information of a bidder or offeror
27. **Insurance:** Communications between an agency and its insurance carrier, administrative service organization, or risk management office. This exemption does not apply to contracts between agencies and these entities or to financial records relating to the provision of insurance
28. **Social services:** Records identifying individuals who apply for or receive social services or disclosing the social services received by an individual
29. **Constituent letters:** Correspondence between a person and a legislator that would identify a person requesting assistance or constituent services. This exemption does not apply to communications from lobbyists
30. **Identity of minors:** Records identifying the name, home address, or date of birth of a child 17 years of age or younger

## LEGISLATIVE AGENCIES

### What are legislative agencies?

These include the state House of Representatives and Senate, the political party caucuses of the state House and Senate, and a number of specifically-listed commissions and entities:

- Capitol Preservation Committee
- Center for Rural Pennsylvania
- Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee
- Joint State Government Commission
- Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
- Legislative Data Processing Committee
- Independent Regulatory Review Commission
- Legislative Reference Bureau
- Local Government Commission
- Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing
- Legislative Reapportionment Commission
- Legislative Office of Research Liaison
- Legislative Audit Advisory Commission

### What records can I get from legislative agencies?

The open records law applies only to the legislative records of these agencies. Legislative records include:

- Financial records
- Bills or resolutions that have been introduced
- Fiscal notes
- Co-sponsorship memoranda
- Minutes of public hearings and public committee meetings
- Transcripts of public hearings, when available
- Executive nomination calendars
- Rules of a chamber
- Record of all recorded votes
- Administrative staff manuals and written policies
- Audit reports
- Final and annual reports required to be submitted to the General Assembly
- Legislative Budget and Finance Committee reports
- Daily Legislative Session Calendars and marked calendars
- Records reflecting an appointment of a legislative appointee
- Proposed regulations, final-form regulations and final-omitted regulations
- Results of public opinion surveys and polls

## JUDICIAL AGENCIES

### What are judicial agencies?

These include any court, entity or office with Pennsylvania's unified judicial system, including the offices of magisterial district judges.

### What records can I get from judicial agencies?

The state judicial system and Constitution establish public access to court records and proceedings.

The open records law applies only to the financial records of judicial agencies, which include:

- Accounts, vouchers and contracts dealing with receiving or spending money or acquiring, using or disposing of services, supplies, materials, equipment or property.
- Salaries and other payments or expenses paid to public officials or employees, including their name and title
- Financial audit reports

## OTHER INFORMATION

### Where can I find state contract information online?

The law requires state, legislative and judicial agencies to file contracts of \$5,000 or more with the state Treasury Department for posting on the agency's Website: <http://contracts.patreasury.org/search.aspx>

### Will other records be available online as well?

Yes. Agencies across the state are moving in this direction and making many more records available online. The new open records law encourages agencies to post more public records online, by allowing them to respond to your request by showing you how to access it on their Website.

### How do I reach the Office of Open Records?

Office of Open Records  
Commonwealth Keystone Building  
400 North Street, Plaza Level  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225

E-mail: [openrecords@state.pa.us](mailto:openrecords@state.pa.us)  
Phone: 717-346-9903  
Website: <http://openrecords.state.pa.us>

**The complete text of the new open records law may be read and downloaded from the Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition at [www.pafaic.org](http://www.pafaic.org)**



**STANDARD RIGHT-TO-KNOW REQUEST FORM**

**DATE REQUESTED:**

**REQUEST SUBMITTED BY:**  E-MAIL  U.S. MAIL  FAX  IN-PERSON

**NAME OF REQUESTER :** \_\_\_\_\_

**STREET ADDRESS :** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY/STATE/COUNTY/ZIP(Required):** \_\_\_\_\_

**TELEPHONE (Optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**RECORDS REQUESTED:** *\*Provide as much specific detail as possible so the agency can identify the information.*

**DO YOU WANT COPIES?** YES or NO

**DO YOU WANT TO INSPECT THE RECORDS?** YES or NO

**DO YOU WANT CERTIFIED COPIES OF RECORDS?** YES or NO

**\*\* PLEASE NOTE: RETAIN A COPY OF THIS REQUEST FOR YOUR FILES \*\***  
**\*\* IT IS A REQUIRED DOCUMENT IF YOU WOULD NEED TO FILE AN APPEAL \*\***

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**FOR AGENCY USE ONLY**

**RIGHT TO KNOW OFFICER:**

**DATE RECEIVED BY THE AGENCY:**

**AGENCY FIVE (5) BUSINESS DAY RESPONSE DUE:**

*\*\*Public bodies may fill anonymous verbal or written requests. If the requestor wishes to pursue the relief and remedies provided for in this Act, the request must be in writing. (Section 702.) Written requests need not include an explanation why information is sought or the intended use of the information unless otherwise required by law. (Section 703.)*

# The Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition

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## OUR CORE MISSION

The Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition works to give all Pennsylvanians access to their federal, state and local governments, their records and their proceedings.

We believe that such access results in the most responsive, accountable and effective government, stimulating civic involvement and trust in government.

We seek to help all Pennsylvanians fully realize their rights and carry out their responsibilities as citizens in our democracy.

## OUR CORE WORK

**Education:** Through seminars and publications, we educate citizens, groups and government officials about the importance of open government to democracy and how they can use their rights to get public records.

**Law reform:** We monitor proposed state and federal laws, regulations and court decisions. We provide information to state officials and encourage discussion of open government improvements in Pennsylvania. To the extent allowed by our nonprofit status, we support reforms affecting public records.

**Legal support:** We provide legal resource material to citizens or groups who encounter difficulty in obtaining public records. In open government cases of state-wide importance, we help citizens obtain vigorous legal representation.

Pennsylvania's new Right to Know Law  
may be read online  
at [www.pafoic.org](http://www.pafoic.org).

Printable and PDF versions available  
for downloading.

## Other resources available online from Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition:

- The Pennsylvania Open Government Forum: Post your questions and comments to get quick help from the PaFOIC's team of open-records experts.
- Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act (Open Meetings), also available as printable download.
- Latest news on open government legislation and court cases.

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*This "Quick Guide" was compiled  
by the Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition,  
a non-profit citizens group,  
from information prepared by  
the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records  
and the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association.*

*Have a question about the state's open records (Right to Know)  
or open meetings (Sunshine Act) laws?*

*Get an answer online  
at the Pennsylvania Freedom of Information Coalition  
Open Government Forum*

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