

West Virginia Department of Administration

**Freedom of Information Act Policy**

[DOA – P7]

Effective: January 1, 2016

# West Virginia Department of Administration

## *Freedom of Information Act Policy*

### Purpose

This Freedom of Information Act Policy ("Policy") establishes procedures for Department of Administration Agencies ("DOA Agencies") to respond to Freedom of Information Act Requests ("FOIA Requests") made to DOA Agencies by members of the public, press and any entity outside of West Virginia State Government.

The Department of Administration ("DOA") will strictly follow the requirements of the West Virginia Freedom of Information Act, W.Va. Code §29B-1-1, *et seq.* ("FOIA") As outlined more specifically below, it is the responsibility of each DOA Agency to respond to FOIA Requests in a timely and appropriate manner.

The FOIA is explicit that "all persons are, unless otherwise expressly provided by law, entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and employees." FOIA Requests should be "liberally construed."

### Procedures

- Immediately upon receipt of a FOIA Request, DOA Agencies will provide copies of FOIA Requests to the DOA Secretary's Office. Specifically, copies should be provided to the DOA General Counsel and the DOA Director of Communications.
- FOIA Requests may be received by written correspondence (including e-mail), or transmitted verbally. FOIA Requests must state with "reasonable specificity" the information sought by the requestor.
- Responses to FOIA Requests ("FOIA Responses") must be provided within five (5) business days of the receipt of the FOIA Request. If, for any reason, it will take the DOA Agency longer than five business days to provide responsive materials to the FOIA Request, the DOA Agency must provide a response to the requestor indicating that a response is underway, and indicate a reasonable timeframe for the DOA Agency to provide a formal FOIA Response.
- DOA Agencies may not charge for any aspect of providing a FOIA Response to FOIA Requests. For this reason, DOA Agencies are encouraged to respond to FOIA Requests in the most economical way possible. This may involve providing electronic, rather than paper copies of materials. DOA Agencies are also

encouraged, whenever possible, to provide access to requestors in order to inspect and copy materials on their own, rather than devote agency staff time to generating a response to the FOIA Request.

- Before finalizing a FOIA Response, DOA Agencies will provide copies of the draft FOIA Response to the DOA Secretary's Office. Specifically, copies should be provided to the DOA General Counsel and the DOA Director of Communications.

#### DOA Agency FOIA Compliance Officers

- Each DOA Agency shall identify a FOIA Compliance Officer to review incoming FOIA Requests and coordinate the DOA Agency FOIA Responses as outlined in the "Procedures" section above.
- Each Compliance Officer will be familiar with the requirements of FOIA Responses, and will work directly with his or her Agency's legal counsel to identify exemptions to FOIA Responses identified in W.Va. Code § 29B-1-4.
- The DOA Agency FOIA Compliance Officer will report information regarding each FOIA transaction to the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office, as required by W. Va. Code § 29B-1-3a.

#### General Guidance

Public bodies must log the following information into an online database that will be maintained by the Secretary of State:

- The nature of the FOIA request;
- The nature of the public body's response;
- The time-frame that was necessary to comply in full with the request; and
- The amount of reimbursement charged.

This is the only information that must be reported to the Secretary of State under the revised law. Public bodies shall not provide to the Secretary of State copies of the public records that were the subject of the FOIA request.

Agency reports should be brief, but contain sufficient information for an individual to ascertain the general gist of the FOIA request and the agency's response.

Here are some hypothetical examples:

<b>Request</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Reimbursement</b>
Purchasing Contract Records for a completed transaction.	Provided copies of information sought.	5 days	\$0
Internal memoranda.	Asserted deliberative process/internal memorandum exemption.	5 days	N/A
Older state records.	No responsive records. Advised requester to pose request to State Archives.	5 days	N/A



---

Jason Pizatella  
Secretary  
West Virginia Department of Administration