



Commonwealth of Kentucky
Office of the Attorney General

Daniel Cameron
Attorney General

Capitol Building, Suite 118
700 Capital Avenue
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
(502) 696-5300
Fax: (502) 564-2894

June 24, 2021

***Attorney General Advisory:
Changes to the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act following the
Regular Session of the 2021 General Assembly***

This Attorney General Advisory is intended to provide public agencies and the general public with updates regarding the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act following the Regular Session of the 2021 General Assembly. This Advisory addresses two primary matters.

First, the 2021 General Assembly passed House Bill 312 (HB 312), which makes several important changes to the Open Records Act.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic led to several temporary changes to the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act, such as extending the time for a public agency's response to an open records request to ten days, permitting a public agency to deny in-person inspection of public records, and permitting more flexibility for video and audio conferencing of public meetings. The temporary changes resulted from the enactment of Senate Bill 150 (SB 150) during the Regular Session of the 2020 General Assembly.

In 2021, the General Assembly enacted House Joint Resolution 77 (HJR 77), which declares that the COVID-19 state of emergency ends on June 28, 2021. HJR 77 is the subject of several pending court actions that have resulted in conflicting decisions. Accordingly, the Attorney General recommends that public agencies comply with the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act without resorting to any temporary changes made permissible under SB 150. Doing so will ensure that public agencies meet the requirements of the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act regardless of how courts ultimately rule on HJR 77. Moreover, complying with the Open Records Act and Open Meetings Act as written—and without resort to SB 150—provides Kentuckians with the greatest amount of transparency and government responsiveness while observing best practices in an uncertain legal environment.

Open Records Act

First, HB 312 amends KRS 61.880(1) so that after June 29, 2021, a public agency must respond to a request to inspect records within **five** business days. Previously, the law required a response within three business days.¹

Second, HB 312 also alters how requests to inspect records may be made and accepted. Beginning on June 29, 2021,² only residents of the Commonwealth may request to inspect public records. The definition of “resident” will be codified at KRS 61.870(10), but it includes individuals and businesses living, operating, and working within the Commonwealth, as well as news-gathering organizations.³ Thus, effective June 29, 2021, a person submitting a request to inspect public records must include with the request a statement that the person making the request is a resident of the Commonwealth. A public agency may deny a request to inspect records that does not include such a statement. *See* KRS 61.872(2).

Third, effective June 29, 2021, a public agency must update its policies and procedures to include both the mailing address and email address at which its records custodian may receive requests. KRS 61.876(1)(b). HB 312 requires a public agency to accept a request to inspect records submitted by email to the records custodian’s email address that is contained in the policy. KRS 61.872(2)(a).

Fourth, each public agency must also publish its policies and procedures on its website. KRS 61.876(2). Under HB 312, the Attorney General will promulgate by regulation a standardized form by which any resident may request to inspect public records. That form is available [here](#), and must be made available on each agency’s website. Although a records custodian may not require the use of any particular form, the records custodian must accept any request submitted on the form published by the Attorney General.

Finally, during the COVID-19 state of emergency, a public agency is permitted to deny in-person inspection of public records at the public agency’s headquarters. *See* SB 150 §1(8)(a). A public agency that is subject to the Act, however,

¹ During the COVID-19 state of emergency, SB 150 permits a public agency to respond to a request within ten calendars days. Until the legal effect of HJR 77 is finally resolved by the courts, a public agency should assume that the temporary changes made to the Act by SB 150 will expire on June 28, 2021. Therefore, if a public agency receives a request to inspect records on or after June 29, 2021, then under the amendments to KRS 61.880(1), a public agency must respond to such request within five business days.

² This provision is not affected by pending litigation. Accordingly, it is effective June 29, 2021, without question.

³ HB 312 incorporates by reference the definition of “news-gathering organization” in KRS 189.635(8)(b)1.

Request to Inspect Public Records

Pursuant to the Kentucky Open Records Act ("the Act"), KRS 61.870 *et seq.*, the undersigned requests to inspect the public records which are described below.

Requester's contact information.

Name: [REDACTED]

Mailing Address: [REDACTED]

E-mail Address (if applicable): [REDACTED]

Records to be inspected:
[REDACTED]

Statement regarding the use of public records. KRS 61.870(4) defines "commercial purpose" as "the direct or indirect use of any part of a public record or records, in any form, for sale, resale, solicitation, rent, or lease of a service, or any use by which the user expects a profit either through commission, salary, or fee." However, "commercial purpose" does not include the publication or related use of the public record by a newspaper or periodical, by a radio or television station in its news or informational program, or by use in the prosecution or defense of litigation by the parties to such an action or their attorney.

This request is (choose one):

- NOT for a commercial purpose; or
- FOR a commercial purpose.

Statement regarding residency. I further state that I am a resident of Kentucky because I am (please check one):

- An individual residing in the Commonwealth; or
- A domestic business entity with a location in the Commonwealth; or
- A foreign business entity registered with the Kentucky Secretary of State; or
- An individual that is employed and works at a location within the Commonwealth; or
- An individual or business entity that owns real property within the Commonwealth; or
- An individual or business entity that has been authorized to act on behalf of an individual or business entity listed above; or
- A news-gathering organization as defined in KRS 189.635(8)(b)1a. to e.

Signature: [REDACTED] Date: [REDACTED]

Pursuant to KRS 61.876(4), the Office of Attorney General has promulgated by administrative regulation this form. See 40 KAR 1:040.