

AN ACT concerning public access to government records, amending and supplementing P.L.1963, c.73 and amending P.L.2001, c.404.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. (New section) This act, P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) shall be known and may be cited as the "Martin O'Shea Open Public Records Act."

2. Section 1 of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1) is amended to read as follows:

1. The Legislature finds and declares it to be the public policy of this State that:

government records shall be readily accessible for inspection, copying, or examination [by the citizens of this State], with certain exceptions, for the protection of the public interest, and any limitations on the right of access accorded by P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, shall be construed in favor of the public's right of access;

all government records shall be subject to public access unless exempt from such access by: P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented; any other statute; resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature; regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or Executive Order of the Governor; Executive Order of the Governor; Rules of Court; any federal law, federal regulation, or federal order;

a public agency has a responsibility and an obligation to safeguard from public access a [citizen's] person's personal information with which it has been entrusted when disclosure thereof would violate the [citizen's] person's reasonable expectation of privacy; and nothing contained in P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and supplemented, shall be construed as affecting in any way the common law right of access to any record, including but not limited to criminal investigatory records of a law enforcement agency.

Nothing contained here shall constitute an exception under the law.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.1)

3. Section 1 of P.L.1995, c.23 (C.47:1A-1.1) is amended to read as follows:

1. As used in P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented:

"Biotechnology" means any technique that uses living organisms, or parts of living organisms, to make or modify products, to improve plants or animals, or to develop micro-

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

D

R

A

F

T

organisms for specific uses; including the industrial use of recombinant DNA, cell fusion, and novel bioprocessing techniques.

"Custodian of a government record" or "custodian" means in the case of a municipality, the municipal clerk and in the case of any other public agency, the officer officially designated by formal or written action of that agency's director or governing body, as the case may be.

"Government record" or "record" means any paper, written or printed book, document, drawing, map, plan, photograph, microfilm, data processed or image processed document, information stored or maintained electronically or by sound-recording or in a similar device, or any copy thereof, that has been made, maintained or kept on file in the course of his or its official business by any officer, commission, agency or authority of the State or of any political subdivision thereof, including subordinate boards thereof, or that has been received in the course of his or its official business by any such officer, commission, agency, or authority of the State or of any political subdivision thereof, including subordinate boards thereof. The terms shall not include inter-agency or intra-agency advisory, consultative, or deliberative material.

A government record shall not include the following information which is deemed to be confidential for the purposes of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented:

information received by a member of the Legislature from a constituent or information held by a member of the Legislature concerning a constituent, including but not limited to information in written form or contained in any e-mail or computer data base, or in any telephone record whatsoever, unless it is information the constituent is required by law to transmit;

any memorandum, correspondence, notes, report or other communication prepared by, or for, the specific use of a member of the Legislature in the course of the member's official duties, except that this provision shall not apply to an otherwise publicly-accessible report which is required by law to be submitted to the Legislature or its members;

any copy, reproduction or facsimile of any photograph, negative or print, including instant photographs and videotapes of the body, or any portion of the body, of a deceased person, taken by or for the medical examiner at the scene of death or in the course of a post mortem examination or autopsy made by or caused to be made by the medical examiner except:

when used in a criminal action or proceeding in this State which relates to the death of that person,

for the use as a court of this State permits, by order after good cause has been shown and after written notification of the request for the court order has been served at least five days before the order is made upon the county prosecutor for the county in which the post mortem examination or autopsy occurred,

D

R

A

F

T

for use in the field of forensic pathology or for use in medical or scientific education or research, or

for use by any law enforcement agency in this State or any other state or federal law enforcement agency;

criminal investigatory records;

victims' records, except that a victim of a crime shall have access to the victim's own records;

trade secrets and proprietary commercial or financial information obtained from any source. For the purposes of this paragraph, trade secrets shall include data processing software obtained by a public body under a licensing agreement which prohibits its disclosure;

any record within the attorney-client privilege. This paragraph shall not be construed as exempting from access attorney or consultant bills or invoices except that such bills or invoices may be redacted to remove any information protected by the attorney-client privilege;

administrative or technical information regarding computer hardware, software and networks which, if disclosed, would jeopardize computer security;

emergency or security information or procedures for any buildings or facility which, if disclosed, would jeopardize security of the building or facility or persons therein;

security measures and surveillance techniques which, if disclosed, would create a risk to the safety of persons, property, electronic data or software;

information which, if disclosed, would give an advantage to competitors or bidders;

information generated by or on behalf of public employers or public employees in connection with any sexual harassment complaint filed with a public employer or with any grievance filed by or against an individual or in connection with collective negotiations, including documents and statements of strategy or negotiating position;

information which is a communication between a public agency and its insurance carrier, administrative service organization or risk management office;

information which is to be kept confidential pursuant to court order;

any copy of form DD-214, or that form, issued by the United States Government, or any other certificate of honorable discharge, or copy thereof, from active service or the reserves of a branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, or from service in the organized militia of the State, that has been filed by an individual with a public agency, except that a veteran or the veteran's spouse or surviving spouse shall have access to the veteran's own records; and

that portion of any document which discloses the social security number, credit card number, unlisted telephone number or driver license number of any person; except for use by any government

D

R

A

F

T

agency, including any court or law enforcement agency, in carrying out its functions, or any private person or entity acting on behalf thereof, or any private person or entity seeking to enforce payment of court-ordered child support; except with respect to the disclosure of driver information by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission as permitted by section 2 of P.L.1997, c.188 (C.39:2-3.4); and except that a social security number contained in a record required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file by a public agency shall be disclosed when access to the document or disclosure of that information is not otherwise prohibited by State or federal law, regulation or order or by State statute, resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature, Executive Order of the Governor, rule of court or regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or executive order of the Governor.

A government record shall not include, with regard to any public institution of higher education, the following information which is deemed to be privileged and confidential:

pedagogical, scholarly and/or academic research records and/or the specific details of any research project conducted under the auspices of a public higher education institution in New Jersey, including, but not limited to research, development information, testing procedures, or information regarding test participants, related to the development or testing of any pharmaceutical or pharmaceutical delivery system, except that a custodian may not deny inspection of a government record or part thereof that gives the name, title, expenditures, source and amounts of funding and date when the final project summary of any research will be available;

test questions, scoring keys and other examination data pertaining to the administration of an examination for employment or academic examination;

records of pursuit of charitable contributions or records containing the identity of a donor of a gift if the donor requires non-disclosure of the donor's identity as a condition of making the gift provided that the donor has not received any benefits of or from the institution of higher education in connection with such gift other than a request for memorialization or dedication;

valuable or rare collections of books and/or documents obtained by gift, grant, bequest or devise conditioned upon limited public access;

information contained on individual admission applications; and information concerning student records or grievance or disciplinary proceedings against a student to the extent disclosure would reveal the identity of the student.

"Public agency" or "agency" means any of the principal departments in the Executive Branch of State Government, and any division, board, bureau, office, commission or other instrumentality within or created by such department; the Legislature of the State and any office, board, bureau or commission within or created by

D

R

A

F

T

the Legislative Branch; and any independent State authority, commission, instrumentality or agency. The terms also mean any political subdivision of the State or combination of political subdivisions, and any division, board, bureau, office, commission or other instrumentality within or created by a political subdivision of the State or combination of political subdivisions, and any independent authority, commission, instrumentality or agency created by a political subdivision or combination of political subdivisions.

"Law enforcement agency" means a public agency, or part thereof, determined by the Attorney General to have law enforcement responsibilities.

"Constituent" means any State resident or other person communicating with a member of the Legislature.

"Member of the Legislature" means any person elected or selected to serve in the New Jersey Senate or General Assembly.

"Criminal investigatory record" means a record which is not required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file that is held by a law enforcement agency which pertains to any criminal investigation or related civil enforcement proceeding.

"Victim's record" means an individually-identifiable file or document held by a victims' rights agency which pertains directly to a victim of a crime except that a victim of a crime shall have access to the victim's own records.

"Victim of a crime" means a person who has suffered personal or psychological injury or death or incurs loss of or injury to personal or real property as a result of a crime, or if such a person is deceased or incapacitated, a member of that person's immediate family.

"Victims' rights agency" means a public agency, or part thereof, the primary responsibility of which is providing services, including but not limited to food, shelter, or clothing, medical, psychiatric, psychological or legal services or referrals, information and referral services, counseling and support services, or financial services to victims of crimes, including victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, violent crime, child endangerment, child abuse or child neglect, and the Victims of Crime Compensation Board, established pursuant to P.L.1971, c.317 (C.52:4B-1 et seq.).

(cf: P.L.2005, c.170, s.1)

4. Section 3 of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-3) is amended to read as follows:

3. a. Notwithstanding the provisions of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, where it shall appear that the record or records which are sought to be inspected, copied, or examined shall pertain to an investigation in progress by any public agency, the right of access provided for in P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented may be denied if the inspection, copying or examination of such record or

D

R

A

F

T

records shall be inimical to the public interest; provided, however, that this provision shall not be construed to allow any public agency to prohibit access to a record of that agency that was open for public inspection, examination, or copying before the investigation commenced. Whenever a public agency, during the course of an investigation, obtains from another public agency a government record that was open for public inspection, examination or copying before the investigation commenced, the investigating agency shall provide the other agency with sufficient access to the record to allow the other agency to comply with requests made pursuant to P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.).

b. Notwithstanding the provisions of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and supplemented, the following information, and the relevant documents containing the information, concerning a criminal investigation shall be available to the public within 24 hours or as soon as practicable, of a request for such information:

where a crime has been reported but no arrest yet made, information as to the type of crime, time, location and type of weapon, if any;

if an arrest has been made, information as to the name, address and age of any victims unless there has not been sufficient opportunity for notification of next of kin of any victims of injury and/or death to any such victim or where the release of the names of any victim would be contrary to existing law or court rule. In deciding on the release of information as to the identity of a victim, the safety of the victim and the victim's family, and the integrity of any ongoing investigation, shall be considered;

if an arrest has been made, information as to the defendant's name, age, residence, occupation, marital status and similar background information and, the identity of the complaining party unless the release of such information is contrary to existing law or court rule;

information as to the text of any charges such as the complaint, accusation and indictment unless sealed by the court or unless the release of such information is contrary to existing law or court rule;

information as to the identity of the investigating and arresting personnel and agency and the length of the investigation;

information of the circumstances immediately surrounding the arrest, including but not limited to the time and place of the arrest, resistance, if any, pursuit, possession and nature and use of weapons and ammunition by the suspect and by the police; and

information as to circumstances surrounding bail, whether it was posted and the amount thereof.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this subsection, if the custodian of a government record asserts that part of a particular record is exempt from public access pursuant to P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and supplemented, the custodian shall redact from a copy of the record that portion which the

D

R

A

F

T

custodian asserts is exempt from access and shall promptly permit access to the remainder of the record. If the custodian of a government record redacts information from a copy of the record, he shall inform the requestor of the deletion or excise, why the information was deleted or excised and shall specify the total number of records deleted or excised.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this subsection, where it shall appear that the information and documents requested or to be examined will jeopardize the safety of any person or jeopardize any investigation in progress or may be otherwise inappropriate to release, such information and documents may be withheld. This exception shall be narrowly construed to prevent disclosure of information that would be harmful to a bona fide law enforcement purpose or the public safety. Whenever a law enforcement official determines that it is necessary to withhold information and documents, the official shall issue a brief statement explaining the decision.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.5)

5. Section 6 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-5) is amended to read as follows:

6. a. The custodian of a government record shall permit the record to be inspected, examined, and copied by any person during regular business hours; or in the case of a municipality having a population of 5,000 or fewer according to the most recent federal decennial census, a board of education having a total district enrollment of 500 or fewer, or a public authority having less than \$10 million in assets, during not less than six regular business hours over not less than three business days per week or the entity's regularly-scheduled business hours, whichever is less; unless a government record is exempt from public access by: P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented; any other statute; resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature; regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or Executive Order of the Governor; Executive Order of the Governor; Rules of Court; any federal law; federal regulation; or federal order. Prior to allowing access to any government record, the custodian thereof shall redact from that record any information which discloses the social security number, credit card number, unlisted telephone number, or driver license number of any person; except for use by any government agency, including any court or law enforcement agency, in carrying out its functions, or any private person or entity acting on behalf thereof, or any private person or entity seeking to enforce payment of court-ordered child support; except with respect to the disclosure of driver information by the Division of Motor Vehicles as permitted by section 2 of P.L.1997, c.188 (C.39:2-3.4); and except that a social security number contained in a record required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file by a public agency shall be disclosed when access to

D

R

A

F

T

the document or disclosure of that information is not otherwise prohibited by State or federal law, regulation or order or by State statute, resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature, Executive Order of the Governor, rule of court or regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or executive order of the Governor. Except where an agency can demonstrate an emergent need, a regulation that limits access to government records shall not be retroactive in effect or applied to deny a request for access to a government record that is pending before the agency, the council or a court at the time of the adoption of the regulation.

If a custodian of a government record redacts information from any record, he shall inform the requestor of the redaction, why the information was deleted or excised and shall specify the total number of records deleted or excised.

b. A copy or copies of a government record may be purchased by any person upon payment of the fee prescribed by law or regulation, or if a fee is not prescribed by law or regulation, upon payment of the actual cost of duplicating the record. Except as otherwise provided by law or regulation, the fee assessed for the duplication of a government record embodied in the form of printed matter shall not exceed [the following: first page to tenth page, \$0.75 per page; eleventh page to twentieth page, \$0.50 per page; all pages over twenty, \$0.25] \$0.10 per page for letter size paper and \$0.15 per page for legal size paper. The actual cost of duplicating the record shall be the cost of materials and supplies used to make a copy of the record, but shall not include the cost of labor or other overhead expenses associated with making the copy [except as provided for in subsection c. of this section]. If a public agency can demonstrate that its actual costs for duplication of a government record exceed the foregoing rates, the public agency shall [be permitted to] charge the actual cost of duplicating the record if the costs are easily determinable.

If a public agency maintains the record in an electronic format or medium and can demonstrate that the record can be electronically mailed without charge to the requestor, it shall make the requestor aware and allow for delivery of the record in such format or medium.

c. Whenever the nature, format, medium, manner of collation, or volume of a government record embodied in the form of printed matter to be inspected, examined, or copied pursuant to this section is such that the record cannot be reproduced by ordinary document copying equipment in ordinary business size or involves an extraordinary expenditure of time and effort to accommodate the request, the public agency may charge, in addition to the actual cost of duplicating the record, a special service charge that shall be reasonable and shall be based upon the actual direct cost of providing the copy or copies; provided, however, that [in the case of a municipality, rates for the duplication of particular records

D

R

A

F

T

when the actual cost of copying exceeds the foregoing rates shall be established in advance by ordinance] if the special service charge includes a charge for time, it shall be based on a posted hourly rate based on the actual direct cost. The requestor shall have the opportunity to review and object to the charge prior to it being incurred.

d. A custodian shall permit access to a government record and provide a copy thereof in the format or medium requested if the public agency maintains the record in that format or medium. If the public agency does not maintain the record in the format or medium requested, the custodian shall either convert the record to the format or medium requested or provide a copy in some other meaningful format or medium. If a request is for a record: (1) in a format or medium not routinely used by the agency; (2) not routinely developed or maintained by an agency; or (3) requiring a substantial amount of manipulation or programming of information technology, the agency may charge, in addition to the actual cost of duplication, a special charge that shall be reasonable and shall be based on the cost for any extensive use of information technology, or for the labor cost of personnel providing the service, based on a posted hourly rate, that is actually incurred by the agency or attributable to the agency for the programming, clerical, and supervisory assistance required, or both.

e. Immediate access ordinarily shall be granted to budgets, bills, vouchers, contracts, including collective negotiations agreements and individual employment contracts, and public employee salary and overtime information.

For the purposes of this subsection, immediate access shall mean within three hours for any request made before 2 p.m. and it shall mean by 10 a.m. of the next business day for any request made after 2 p.m.

f. The custodian of a public agency shall adopt a form for the use of any person who requests access to a government record held or controlled by the public agency. The form shall provide space for the name, address, and phone number of the requestor and a brief description of the government record sought. The form shall include space for the custodian to indicate which record will be made available, when the record will be available, and the fees to be charged. The form shall also include the following: (1) specific directions and procedures for requesting a record; (2) a statement as to whether prepayment of fees or a deposit is required; (3) the time period within which the public agency is required by P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, to make the record available; (4) a statement of the requestor's right to challenge a decision by the public agency to deny access and the procedure for filing an appeal; (5) space for the custodian to list reasons if a request is denied in whole or in part; (6) space for the requestor to sign and date the form; (7) space for the custodian to sign and date the form if the request is fulfilled or denied.

D

R

A

F

T

If a request for information is made in writing on a document other than the form adopted by the public agency and the request contains the requisite information prescribed in this subsection, the custodian shall treat the request as if made on the form adopted by the public agency. The request made on a document other than the form adopted by the public agency shall clearly and conspicuously state that the request is a records request made under the provisions of the open public records act of this State.

The custodian may require a deposit against costs for reproducing documents sought through an anonymous request whenever the custodian anticipates that the information thus requested will cost in excess of \$5 to reproduce.

g. A request for access to a government record shall be in writing and hand-delivered, mailed, transmitted electronically, including by electronic mail, transmitted by facsimile when no more than four pages in length, or otherwise conveyed to the appropriate custodian. A custodian shall promptly comply with a request to inspect, examine, copy, or provide a copy of a government record. If the custodian is unable to comply with a request for access, the custodian shall indicate the specific basis therefor on the request form and promptly return it to the requestor. The custodian shall sign and date the form and provide the requestor with a copy thereof. If the custodian of a government record asserts that part of a particular record is exempt from public access pursuant to P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, the custodian shall delete or excise from a copy of the record that portion which the custodian asserts is exempt from access and shall promptly permit access to the remainder of the record. If the custodian of a government record redacts information from a copy of the record, he shall inform the requestor of the deletion or excision, why the information was deleted or excised and shall specify the total number of records deleted or excised.

If the government record requested is temporarily unavailable because it is in use or in storage, the custodian shall so advise the requestor and shall make arrangements to promptly make available a copy of the record. If a request for access to a government record would substantially disrupt agency operations, the custodian may deny access to the record after attempting to reach a reasonable solution with the requestor that accommodates the interests of the requestor and the agency.

h. Any officer or employee of a public agency who receives a request for access to a government record shall forward the request to the custodian of the record or direct the requestor to the custodian of the record.

i. Unless a shorter time period is otherwise provided by statute, regulation, or executive order, a custodian of a government record shall grant access to a government record or deny a request for access to a government record as soon as possible, but not later than seven business days after receiving the request, including the

D

R

A

F

T

business day on which the request was received, provided that the record is currently available and not in storage or archived. In the event a custodian fails to respond within seven business days after receiving a request, the failure to respond shall be deemed a denial of the request, unless the requestor has elected not to provide a name, address or telephone number, or other means of contacting the requestor. If the requestor has elected not to provide a name, address, or telephone number, or other means of contacting the requestor, the custodian shall not be required to respond until the requestor reappears before the custodian seeking a response to the original request. If the government record is in storage or archived, the requestor shall be so advised within seven business days after the custodian receives the request. The requestor shall be advised by the custodian when the record can be made available. If the record is not made available by that time, access shall be deemed denied.

A request received after 2 p.m. shall be deemed as received on the next business day.

j. A custodian shall post prominently in public view in the part or parts of the office or offices of the custodian that are open to or frequented by the public a statement that sets forth in clear, concise and specific terms the right to appeal a denial of, or failure to provide, access to a government record by any person for inspection, examination, or copying or for purchase of copies thereof and the procedure by which an appeal may be filed.

The custodian of a public agency that has a website shall, at a minimum, prominently post on the website the name, electronic mail address, phone number, and facsimile number for the custodian of records.

k. The files maintained by the Office of the Public Defender that relate to the handling of any case shall be considered confidential and shall not be open to inspection by any person unless authorized by law, court order, or the State Public Defender. (cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.6)

6. Section 8 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-7) is amended to read as follows:

8. a. There is established in, but not of, the Department of Community Affairs a Government Records Council. The council shall consist of the Commissioner of Community Affairs or the commissioner's designee, the Commissioner of Education or the commissioner's designee, **[and]** three public members appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate, not more than two of whom shall be of the same political party and two public members appointed by the Governor, one of whom shall be appointed from among three persons recommended by the Senate President and one of whom shall be appointed from among three persons recommended by the Senate Minority Leader. The **[three]** five public members appointed by the Governor shall serve during

D

R

A

F

T

the term of the Governor making the appointment and until the appointment of a successor. The two public members appointed by the Governor from among the recommendations of the Senate President and the Senate Minority Leader shall be persons with knowledge of or experience with news media. A public member shall not hold any other State or local elected or appointed office or employment while serving as a member of the council. A public member shall not receive a salary for service on the council but shall be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses associated with serving on the council and may receive such per diem payment as may be provided in the annual appropriations act. A member may be removed by the Governor for cause. Vacancies among the public members shall be filled in the same manner in which the original appointment was made. The members of the council shall choose one of the public members to serve as the council's chair. The council may employ an executive director and such professional and clerical staff as it deems necessary and may call upon the Department of Community Affairs for such assistance as it deems necessary and may be available to it.

b. The Government Records Council shall:

establish an informal mediation program to facilitate the resolution of disputes regarding access to government records;

receive, hear, review and adjudicate a complaint filed by any person concerning a denial of access to a government record by a records custodian;

issue advisory opinions, on its own initiative, as to whether a particular type of record is a government record which is accessible to the public;

prepare guidelines and an informational pamphlet for use by records custodians in complying with the law governing access to public records;

prepare an informational pamphlet explaining the public's right of access to government records and the methods for resolving disputes regarding access, which records custodians shall make available to persons requesting access to a government record;

prepare lists for use by records custodians of the types of records in the possession of public agencies which are government records;

make training opportunities available for records custodians and other public officers and employees which explain the law governing access to public records; and

operate an informational website and a toll-free helpline staffed by knowledgeable employees of the council during regular business hours which shall enable any person, including records custodians, to call for information regarding the law governing access to public records and allow any person to request mediation or to file a complaint with the council when access has been denied;

In implementing the provisions of subsections d. and e. of this section, the council shall: act, to the maximum extent possible, at the convenience of the parties; utilize teleconferencing, faxing of

D

R

A

F

T

documents, e-mail and similar forms of modern communication; and when in-person meetings are necessary, send representatives to meet with the parties at a location convenient to the parties.

c. At the request of the council, a public agency shall produce documents and ensure the attendance of witnesses with respect to the council's investigation of any complaint or the holding of any hearing.

d. Upon receipt of a written complaint signed by any person alleging that a custodian of a government record has improperly denied that person access to a government record, the council shall offer the parties the opportunity to resolve the dispute through mediation. Mediation shall enable a person who has been denied access to a government record and the custodian who denied or failed to provide access thereto to attempt to mediate the dispute through a process whereby a neutral mediator, who shall be trained in mediation selected by the council, acts to encourage and facilitate the resolution of the dispute. Mediation shall be an informal, nonadversarial process having the objective of helping the parties reach a mutually acceptable, voluntary agreement. The mediator shall assist the parties in identifying issues, foster joint problem solving, and explore settlement alternatives.

e. If any party declines mediation or if mediation fails to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties, the council shall initiate an investigation concerning the facts and circumstances set forth in the complaint. The council shall make a determination as to whether the complaint is within its jurisdiction or frivolous or without any reasonable factual basis. If the council shall conclude that the complaint is outside its jurisdiction, frivolous or without factual basis, it shall reduce that conclusion to writing and transmit a copy thereof to the complainant and to the records custodian against whom the complaint was filed. Otherwise, the council shall notify the records custodian against whom the complaint was filed of the nature of the complaint and the facts and circumstances set forth therein. The custodian shall have the opportunity to present the board with any statement or information concerning the complaint which the custodian wishes. If the council is able to make a determination as to a record's accessibility based upon the complaint and the custodian's response thereto, it shall reduce that conclusion to writing and transmit a copy thereof to the complainant and to the records custodian against whom the complaint was filed. If the council is unable to make a determination as to a record's accessibility based upon the complaint and the custodian's response thereto, the council shall conduct a hearing on the matter in conformity with the rules and regulations provided for hearings by a State agency in contested cases under the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), insofar as they may be applicable and practicable. The council shall, by a majority vote of its members, render a decision as to whether the record which is the subject of

D

R

A

F

T

the complaint is a government record which must be made available for public access pursuant to P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented. If the council determines, by a majority vote of its members, that a custodian has knowingly and willfully violated P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and supplemented, and is found to have unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances, the council may impose the penalties provided for in section 12 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-11). A decision of the council may be appealed to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court. A decision of the council shall not have value as a precedent for any case initiated in Superior Court pursuant to section 7 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-6). All proceedings of the council pursuant to this subsection shall be conducted as expeditiously as possible.

f. The council shall not charge any party a fee in regard to actions filed with the council. The council shall be subject to the provisions of the "Open Public Meetings Act," P.L.1975, c.231 (C.10:4-6), except that the council may go into closed session during that portion of any proceeding during which the contents of a contested record would be disclosed. A requestor who prevails in any proceeding shall be entitled to a reasonable attorney's fee.

g. The council shall not have jurisdiction over the Judicial or Legislative Branches of State Government or any agency, officer, or employee of those branches.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.8)

7. Section 11 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-10) is amended to read as follows:

11. Notwithstanding the provisions of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) or any other law to the contrary, the personnel or pension records of any individual in the possession of a public agency, including but not limited to records relating to any grievance filed by or against an individual, shall not be considered a government record and shall not be made available for public access, except that:

an individual's name, title, position, salary, payroll record, length of service, date of separation and the reason therefor, and the amount and type of any pension received shall be a government record;

personnel or pension records of any individual shall be accessible when required to be disclosed by another law, when disclosure is essential to the performance of official duties of a person duly authorized by this State or the United States, or when authorized by an individual in interest; [and]

disciplinary records when the employee was found to have violated a practice or policy shall be a government record;

information pertaining to settlements of lawsuits or claims involving public agencies, public officials or employees shall be a government record; and

D

R

A

F

T

data contained in information which disclose conformity with specific experiential, educational or medical qualifications required for government employment or for receipt of a public pension, but not including any detailed medical or psychological information, shall be a government record.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.11)

8. Section 12 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-11) is amended to read as follows:

12. a. A public official, officer, employee or custodian who [knowingly and willfully] arbitrarily violates P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and supplemented, and is found to have unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances, shall be subject to a civil penalty of \$1,000 for an initial violation, \$2,500 for a second violation that occurs within 10 years of an initial violation, and \$5,000 for a third violation that occurs within 10 years of an initial violation. This penalty shall be collected and enforced in proceedings in accordance with the "Penalty Enforcement Law of 1999," P.L.1999, c.274 (C.2A:58-10 et seq.), and the rules of court governing actions for the collection of civil penalties. The Superior Court shall have jurisdiction of proceedings for the collection and enforcement of the penalty imposed by this section.

Appropriate disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against a public official, officer, employee or custodian against whom a penalty has been imposed.

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.12)

9. Section 14 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-13) is amended to read as follows:

14. The Commissioner of Community Affairs shall include in the annual budget request of the Department of Community Affairs [a] the request submitted by the Government Records Council for sufficient funds to effectuate the purposes of section 8 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-7).

(cf: P.L.2001, c.404, s.14)

10. This act shall take effect immediately but shall remain inoperative for 30 days.

STATEMENT

This bill makes changes to the open public records act (OPRA). The bill:

*formally names OPRA as the "Martin O'Shea Open Public Records Act" in honor of Martin O'Shea, a tireless advocate for broad public access to government records;

*allows an OPRA request to be made by anyone, not only residents of New Jersey;

D

R

A

F

T

*requires that documents containing certain information concerning criminal investigations be made available to the public within 24 hours or as soon as practicable;

*changes the copying cost fee to a flat \$0.10 cents per page for each letter size sheet and \$0.15 cents per page for each legal size sheet;

*provides that the special service charge for an OPRA request requiring extraordinary equipment or effort be based on a posted hourly rate based on the actual direct cost if the charge includes a charge for time;

*allows the option of e-mailing the requested records without charge to the requestor when possible and the requestor agrees;

*allows the OPRA request to be e-mailed, or faxed when no more than four pages in length;

*requires the record custodian to accept a record request made on a document other than the adopted form if it contains a notice that it is an OPRA request and contains the information required on the adopted form;

*provides that if information is redacted from a record that the record custodian will notify the requestor why the information is redacted and to indicate the total number of records redacted;

*clarifies that the seven day response period includes the day the OPRA request is received;

*provides that a request received after 2 p.m. is deemed received the next business day;

*provides definition of immediate access with regard to certain specified information;

*requires contact information for the custodian of a public agency to be included on the agency website;

*provides that a personnel record containing certain disciplinary actions and settlement information on lawsuits or claims is not exempt from OPRA requests;

*changes the knowingly and willfully standard for violations of the OPRA to an arbitrary standard;

*adds two members to the Government Records Council, both appointed by the Governor, but one appointed from a list of three persons recommended by the Senate President and one appointed from a list of three persons recommended by the Senate Minority Leader, who have knowledge of or experience with news media;

*changes the Government Records Council from being in the Department of Community Affairs to being in, but not of, the Department of Community Affairs; and

*requires the Government Records Council to submit an annual budget request to the Commissioner of Community Affairs.

Makes certain changes to open public records act; formally names open public records act “Martin O’Shea Open Public Records Act.”

D

R

A

F

T

D
R
A
F
T