PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY OF LAKE TOWNSHIP, STARK COUNTY, OHIO

As amended March 13, 2023 to Include "Limitations and Definitions" and Adopt "Response to Public Records Request" Form (Attachment No. 1)

As amended March 24, 2025 to include language which reflects the new costs permitted under House Bill 315. Effective April 3, 2025 (Section 3.5)

As amended October 13, 2025 to include language authorizing the police department to have the discretionary decision to charge for paper copies.

Introduction:

It is the policy of Lake Township in Stark County that openness leads to a better informed citizenry, which leads to more transparent government and a more sound public policy. It is our policy to strictly adhere to the state's Public Records Act as well as other state and federal laws.

Ohio's Public Records Act imposes two primary obligations upon public offices:

1. Provide prompt inspection of public records (R.C. 149.43(B)(1)); and
2. Provide copies of public records within a reasonable period of time (R.C. 149.43(B)(2)).

The Public Records Act evolved from the principle that Ohio's citizens are entitled to access the records of their government. We agree that to advance that principle, the Public Records Act should be interpreted liberally in favor of disclosure.

Section 1. Public records

Under Ohio law, a public office may only create records that are necessary for the adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures and essential transactions of the agency and for the protection of the legal and financial rights of the state and persons directly affect by the agency's activities. (R.C. 149.40).

In accordance with the Ohio Revised Code and court rulings, "records" are defined as those items that meet all of the following:

1. any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including an electronic record (which includes but is not limited to e-mail or other record created, generated, sent, communicated, received, or stored by electronic means);

2. that is created or received by, or coming under the jurisdiction of a public office; and

3. that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office. (R.C. § 149.011(G)).

The determination of whether a specific item constitutes a "record" will depend on the facts and circumstances surrounding the particular item requested. The Ohio Courts have imposed an actual use standard in defining a "record," which means that an item is not automatically a "record" simply because the public office could (but did not) use a document it received to carry out its duties and responsibilities.

Furthermore, a public office is not required to create new records to respond to a public records request, even if it is only a matter of compiling information from existing records.

Section 1.1

It is the policy of Lake Township in Stark County that, as required by Ohio law, records will be organized and maintained so that they are made available for inspection to any person at all reasonable times during regular business hours. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1).

Copies will be made available upon request within a reasonable period of time. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1)).

A current record retention schedule will be readily available to the public upon request. (R.C. 149.43(B)(2))

Section 1.2

Not all of Lake Township's records are "public records." Certain records are exempt from the Public Records Act. Exempt records include records: (1) the release of which is *prohibited* by state or federal law, or 2) that are subject to an express exception set forth in Ohio's Public Records Act, which may be released only if Lake Township decides to waive the express exception.

Examples of records, the release of which is *prohibited* by state or federal law, include, but are not limited to, the following:

Attorney-client privileged information;

Records of a Certified Public Accountant or public accountant in the performance of an audit of a public office (R.C. 4701.19(B));

Federal tax returns (26 U.S.C. 6103(a));

Criminal background information and other law enforcement information on the LEADS/CCH/NCIC computer database (42 U.S.C. 3789g);

Records that have been sealed pursuant to a statutorily authorized court order (*i.e.* R.C. 2953.52);

Peace officer's home address during the pendency of a criminal case in which the officer is a witness or arresting officer (R.C. 2921.24(A)); and

Employees' and their family members records that were created for purposes of the Family Medical Leave Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act (29 CFR 825.500(g) and 1630.14(c)(1)).

Examples of records that are subject to an express exception set forth in Ohio's Public Records Act, which may be released only if Lake Township decides to waive the express exception include, but are not limited to, the following:

Peace Officer, firefighter, EMT, prosecutor, assistant prosecutor, children's services worker, or corrections officer, Residential and Familial Information (R.C. 149.43(A)(7));

Records that pertain to a patient's medical history, diagnosis, prognosis, or medical condition and that were general and maintained in the process of medical treatment (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(a));

Records that contain information that was specifically compiled in reasonable anticipation of, or in defense of, a civil or criminal action or proceeding (R.C. 149.43(A)(1)(g)); and

Records that pertain to a law enforcement matter of a criminal, quasi-criminal, civil, or administrative nature and that, if released, would create a high probability of disclosing any of the following (1) the identity of an uncharged suspect, (2) the identity of a confidential source, (3) specific confidential investigatory techniques or procedures; (4) specific investigative work product; or (5) information that would endanger the life or physical safety of law enforcement personnel, a crime victim, a witness, or a confidential source (R.C. 149.43(A)(2)).

The *exemptions* to the Public Records Act will be narrowly construed by this office in the favor of disclosure. This office may seek a legal review prior to determining whether or not an exception applies.

Section 2. Record requests

Each request for public records should be evaluated for a response using the following guidelines:

Section 2.1

Although no specific language is required to make a request, the requester must at least identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow this office to identify, retrieve, and review the records. If a requester makes an ambiguous or overly broad request or has difficulty in making a request for copies or inspection of public records such that this office cannot reasonably identify what public records are being requested, then this office may deny the request. In such case, this office will provide the requester with an opportunity to revise the request by informing him of the manner in which records are maintained by the office and accessed in the ordinary course of this office's duties. (R.C. 149.43(B)(2)).

Section 2.2

The requester does not have to put a records request in writing, and does not have to provide his identity or the intended use of the requested public record. However, the records custodian may ask for a written request and may ask for the requestor's identity and/or intended use of the information requested if (1) it would benefit the requestor by helping the public office identify, locate or deliver the records being sought, and (2) the requestor is informed that a written request and the requestor's identity and intended use of the information requested are not required. (R.C. 149.43(B)(5)).

Section 2.21

This office will permit a requester to choose to have the public record duplicated upon paper, upon the same medium which this office keeps it, or upon any other medium which this office determines that it reasonably can be duplicated as an integral part of the normal operations of this office. This office is not required to allow the requester to make the copies of the public record. (R.C. 149.43(B)(6)).

Section 2.3

Public records should be available for inspection at all reasonable times during regular business hours. Public records should be made available for inspection promptly. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1). To the extent that an office may operate 24-hours-a-day, the records of that office will be made available for inspection during normal administrative hours.

Copies of public records should be made available within a reasonable period of time. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1)).

The determination of the terms "prompt" and "reasonable" take into account the volume of records requested; the proximity of the location where the records are stored; and the necessity for any legal review of the records requested.

Section 2.4

Each request should be evaluated for an estimated length of time required to gather the records. Routine requests for records should be satisfied immediately if feasible to do so. Routine requests include, but are not limited to, meeting minutes, both in draft and final form, resolutions, budgets, etc.

Section 2.5

Upon request, this office will provide copies of public records to a requester by United States mail or by any other delivery means or transmission that this office deems reasonable. (R.C. 149.43(B)(7)).

This office will limit to ten the number of copies of public records provided per month to a requester by United States Mail, unless the requester certifies in writing that he/she does not intend to use or forward the requested records, or the information contained in them, for commercial purposes. The word "commercial" should be narrowly construed and does not include reporting or gathering news, reporting or gathering information to assist citizen oversight or understanding of the operation or activities of government, or nonprofit educational research. (R.C. 149.43(B)(7)).

Section 2.6

By Ohio law, this office is not required to permit a person who is incarcerated pursuant to a criminal conviction or a juvenile adjudication to inspect or to obtain a copy of any public record concerning a criminal investigation or prosecution or concerning what would be a criminal investigation if the subject of the investigation or prosecution were an adult, unless the judge who imposed the sentence or made the adjudication with respect to the person, or the judge's successor in office, finds that the information sought in the public record is necessary to support what appears to be a justifiable claim of the person. R.C. 149.43(B)(8).

Section 2.7

This office, in response to a written request made and signed by a journalist, which must include the journalist's name and title and the name and address of the journalist's employer and which states that the disclosure of the information sought would be in the public interest, will provide the address of the actual personal residence of anyone employed by this office as a peace officer, firefighter, EMT, prosecutor, assistant prosecutor, children's services worker, or corrections officer, and, if such employee's spouse, former spouse, or child is employed by a public office, the name and address of that public office. (R.C. 149.43(B)(9)).

Section 2.8

Any denial of public records requested, in part or in whole, should include an explanation, including legal authority, as to why the request was denied. If the initial request was provided in writing, the explanation for denial will be provided to the requester in writing. (R.C. 149.43(B)(3)).

If portions of a record are public and portions are exempt, the exempt portions should be redacted and the rest released. If there are redactions, the office will notify the requester of any redaction or make the redaction plainly visible. Each redaction should be accompanied by a supporting explanation, including legal authority, as to why the redaction was made. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1) and (2)).

Section 2.9

This office has no duty to provide records acquired after a request for records is complete.

Section 3. Costs for Public Records

Those seeking public records should be charged only the actual cost of making copies, unless the cost is otherwise set by statute. (R.C. 149.43(B)(1)). Employee time should not be calculated into the charge for copying a public record. However, in the event that circumstances make it reasonable for this office to hire an outside contractor to make copies of requested records, the requester will be charged the actual cost paid to the outside contractor for the copying service. (R.C. 149.43(F)(2)(a)). These circumstances may include but not be limited to a lack of in-house photocopying resources or labor.

This office has no duty to provide copies of public records free of charge to someone who indicates an inability or unwillingness to pay for them.

Section 3.1 The charge for paper copies is the first five are free and then [FIVE] cents per page thereafter. The police department will have the discretionary decision to charge for paper copies.

Section 3.2

This office may require a requester to pay in advance the cost involved in providing the copy of the public record, as requested. (R.C. 149.43(B)(6)).

Section 3.3

Upon request, this office will provide copies of public records to a requester by United States mail or by any other delivery means or transmission that this office deems reasonable. This office may require such a requester to pay in advance the cost of postage or costs incurred for other supplies used in the mailing, delivery, or transmission. (R.C. 149.43(B)(7)).

Section 3.4

There may be instances when this office may be able to provide copies made in-house without disrupting its normal functions, but only over an extended period of time. In that instance, this office may offer the requester the options of (1) having the documents produced through a faster method by employing temporary personnel and equipment, (2) using an external private contractor, or (3) having the documents produced in-house by this public office's normal staff and equipment in a less efficient and more time-consuming manner.

Section 3.5

Lake Township may charge a fee for the production of video footage from body-worn cameras, dash-mounted cameras, or surveillance cameras. The fee is $75 per hour of video footage, with a maximum charge of $750 per request. This fee is necessary to cover the costs associated with reviewing, redacting, processing, storing, and distributing video files. Lake Township may require payment in advance based on the estimated cost of production. (25-122)

Section 4. Failure to respond to a public records request

This office recognizes the legal and non-legal consequences of failure to properly respond to a public records request. In addition to the distrust in government that failure to comply may cause, this office's failure to comply with a request may result in the requester commencing a mandamus action against this office in either the court of common pleas, in the court of appeals, or in the Supreme Court of Ohio. The court may order this office to

comply with the Public Records Act, as well as order this office to pay statutory damages of one hundred dollars for each business day, beginning with the day the requester files the mandamus action, during which this public office failed to comply, up to a maximum of one thousand dollars, as well as court costs and the requester's reasonable attorney fees. (07-369)

Ohio Public Records Requests – Limitations and Definitions

The Ohio Public Records Act requires the following:

> Upon request by any person . . ., all **public records responsive to the request shall be promptly prepared and made available for inspection** to the requester at all reasonable times during regular business hours. Subject to division (B)(8) of this section, upon request by any person, **a public office or person responsible for public records shall make copies of the requested public record available** to the requester at cost and within a reasonable period of time. R.C. 149.43(B)(1). (Emphasis added).

For purposes of the Act, "public office" includes "any state agency, public institution, political subdivision, or other organized body, office, agency, institution, or entity established by the laws of this state for the exercise of any function of government." R.C. 149.011(A).

"'Records' includes any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including an electronic record as defined in section 1306.01 of the Revised Code, created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office of the state or its political subdivisions, which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office." R.C. 149.011(A). Thus, a writing, or other item, which does not serve to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office does not constitute "record" that must be produced. See, *State ex rel. Dispatch Printing Co. v. Johnson*, 106 Ohio St.3d 160, 2005-Ohio-4384, ¶ 29; *State ex rel. Fant v. Enright*, 66 Ohio St.3d 186, 188, (1993) ("To the extent that any item . . . is not a 'record,' i.e., does not serve to document the organization, etc., of the public office, it is not a public record and need not be disclosed."). See also, *State ex rel. Margolius v. City of Cleveland*, 62 Ohio St.3d 456, 461 (1992).

When responding to a request labeled as, or deemed, a public records request, a public office is not required to:

> Provide "information" generally. The public records law applies to "records" and not information that is not contained in a fixed or physical form. E.g., *State ex rel. Granite Fin. Assn. v. DeWine*, 2014 Ohio Misc.

LEXIS 10560, *8-9 (C.P.); *Capers v. White*, 2002 Ohio App. LEXIS 1962, &9 (C.P.)

Provide responses to broad inquiries "regarding" an identified topic. Requests for all records "regarding" a subject or topic seek information rather than specific records and, thus, are ambiguous. See, *State ex rel. Kesterson v. Kent State Univ.*, 156 Ohio St. 3d 22, 2018-Ohio-5110, && 28-30; *Decrane v. City of Cleveland*, 2018-Ohio-3651, &6 (Ct. Claims); *Frank v. Upper Arlington Schools*, 2018-Ohio-1554 (Ct. Claims).

Create new records, by compiling materials or merging information contained in multiple formats. *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, 85 Ohio St. 3d 153, 154, 1999-Ohio-447.

Index, sort or organize records in any particular manner as identified in a request. *State ex rel. White v. Goldsberry*, supra.

Provide any interpretation, explanation or comment on any record identified as responsive to a request. *Kovach v. Geauga Cty. Auditor's Office*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00917PQ, 2019-Ohio-5455, ¶10 (Auditor correctly denied requests seeking explanations or reasons for public actions); *Isreal v. Franklin Cty. Commrs.*, Ct. of Cl. No. 2019-00548PQ, 2019-Ohio-5457, ¶¶8-9.

Produce any record falling within the attorney-client privilege or other privilege. See, *State ex rel. Toledo Blade Co. v. Toledo-Lucas County Port Auth.*, 121 Ohio St. 3d 537, 2009-Ohio-1767; *State ex rel. Summers v. Fox*, 163 Ohio St. 3d 217, 2020-Ohio-5585. See also, *State ex rel. Caster v. Columbus*, 151 Ohio St. 3d 425, 2016-Ohio-8394; *Barnes v. Columbus*, 2011-Ohio-2808 (10th Dist.); *State ex rel. Cranford v. Cleveland*, 103 Ohio St. 3d 196, 2004-Ohio-4884, &22.

Attachment No. 1

Response to Public Records Request
Ohio Revised Code Chapter 149, Documents, Reports and records; §149.011, Documents, Reports and records Definitions; §149.43, Availability of Public Records for Inspection and copying; Records Deemed Not Public Records (Exemptions for Non-Disclosure)

What is not required of the Public Entity in response to Request for Availability, Inspection and Copying of Public Records pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Chapter 149;

The Public Entity is only required to provide a requester with records (written documents, photographs electronic, and digital files prepared by the Public Entity which tend to document the statutory duties of the Public Entity and any action in performance of those duties which are in the care custody and control of the public entity:

THE PUBLIC ENTITY IS NOT REQUIRED TO;

1. PROVIDE YOU WITH INFORMATION BUT ONLY RECORDS.
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2. CREATE NEW RECORDS, BY COMPILING AND MERGING INFORMATION CONTAINED IN MULTIPLE RECORDS, OR THE CREATION OF ABSTRACTED INFORMATION OR A SUMMARY OF THE INFOMATION CONTAINED ON A RECORD OR RECORDS.

3. PROVIDE THE RECORDS FREE OF CHARGE.

4. INDEX, SORT OR ORGANIZE THE RECORDS FOR YOU.

5. INTERPRET, EXPAIN OF COMMENT ON THE RECORDS PROVIDED OTHER THAN TO IDENTIFY THEM AS BEING IN COMPLIANCE WITH YOUR REQUEST.

6. THE PUBLIC ENTITY MAY REJECT YOUR REQUEST AND ASK YOU TO RESUBMIT IT IF YOUR ORIGINAL REQUEST IS VAGUE, THE DESCRIPTION OF WHICH IS INSUFFICIENT TO REASONABLY IDENTIFY THE RECORDS REQUESTED.