December 1, 2008

MEMORANDUM

To: College Presidents
From: Frederick P. Schaffer
Re: Updated General Guidance on Compliance With the Freedom of Information Law

This memorandum contains general guidance on compliance with the New York State Freedom of Information Law ("FOIL"); Public Officers Law §§ 84 et seq., focusing on changes to the law since 2005, including those that became effective on August 7, 2008. A copy of the updated law is attached to this memorandum. This memorandum supersedes and replaces this office’s memorandum on FOIL compliance dated October 6, 1995.

1. Informing the Public About Records Access.

   Since 2006, FOIL has required that each governmental entity that maintains a website post information there on how to request public records under FOIL. As FOIL requests are processed separately at each college, each college should have information on its website describing how college records can be accessed under FOIL, including, at a minimum (a) the name of the Records Access Officer to whom requests shall be directed; (b) the times and places, if any, that public records are available for inspection and copying; (c) information on how to request records in person, by mail, or by e-mail; and (d) a link to the website of the Committee on Open Government, http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/coogwww.html. The Committee on Open Government is responsible for overseeing and advising on compliance with FOIL.

2. Form of Request for Records.

   Under the University’s Procedures, members of the public may request records either orally or in writing. It is highly recommended that FOIL requests be accepted only in writing, to ensure that the college understands what, specifically, is being requested. In 2006, FOIL was amended to provide that requests for records may be made by electronic mail.
3. Procedure for Responding to FOIL Requests.

It is very important that all FOIL requests that are received by the college be forwarded immediately to the Records Access Officer, to enable the Records Access Officer to respond to the request in a timely fashion and produce the requested documents to the extent required by law.

FOIL contains a very specific timetable by which the Records Access Officer must respond to requests. Within five (5) business days of receipt of a written request for records, the Records Access Officer must either:

(a) grant the request and make the records available;

(b) deny the request in writing, stating the basis for the denial, and informing the requester of the right to appeal to this office; or

(c) furnish a written acknowledgment of the request with an approximate date when the request will be granted or denied in whole or in part, which shall be reasonable under the circumstances of the request and shall not be more than twenty business days after the date of the acknowledgment.

If the Records Access Officer responded in accordance with (c) above, and intends to grant the request in whole or in part, but circumstances prevent the disclosure within twenty business days of the acknowledgement of receipt, the Records Access Officer may provide a statement in writing specifying the reason for the inability to disclose and a date certain, within a reasonable period under the circumstances of the request, when the request will be granted in whole or in part.

In the case of FOIL requests received by e-mail (which can be sent at any time), the Committee on Open Government has opined that the request is deemed to have been received on the first business day on which it was received during normal business hours. For example, if an e-mail request is sent at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, it is deemed to have been received at 9 a.m. on Wednesday. In addition, Records Access Officers should be aware that the Committee on Open Government counts the date of receipt (and not the following day, which is more common) as the first day in counting the five business days in which an agency must make its initial response to any FOIL request.

If a request is received by e-mail, it must be responded to by e-mail, unless the requester asks that it be sent in some other fashion.

4. Format of Produced Documents.

The most recent amendments to FOIL make the law much more specific regarding a public body’s obligation to produce documents where information is stored in electronic format. FOIL has always stated, and continues to state, that entities are not required to prepare a new document to respond to a FOIL request. However, given advances in computer technology,
recent court decisions and advisory opinions of the Committee on Open Government have held that when requested records can be extracted from a database without the agency having to do any major computer programming, such records must be produced. The statute has now gone beyond this requirement and states, in Public Officers Law § 89(3)(a):

When an agency has the ability to retrieve or extract a record or data maintained in a computer storage system with reasonable effort, it shall be required to do so. When doing so requires less employee time than engaging in manual retrieval or redactions from non-electronic records, the agency shall be required to retrieve or extract such record or data electronically. Any programming necessary to retrieve a record maintained in a computer storage system and to transfer that record to the medium requested by a person or to allow the transferred record to be read or printed shall not be deemed to be the preparation of a new record.

Furthermore, FOIL provides that “an agency shall provide records on the medium requested by a person, if the agency can reasonably make such copy or have such copy made by engaging an outside professional service.” Public Officers Law, § 87(5)(a). Accordingly, if a person requests documents in a particular electronic format, and the college can reasonably produce the documents in that format, it must do so or, if that is does not have the technological ability to do that, have the copy made by an outside professional service. In addition, if the documents are in hard copy, and the requester wants them in electronic format, it is the position of the Committee on Open Government that the documents must be scanned if the amount of work is substantially the same as photocopying. FOIL-AO-16572 (2007).

5. Fees.

In accordance with FOIL, colleges may charge up to 25 cents per photocopy for records produced in response to a request (except when records are larger than the standard size of 9 by 14 inches). However, the statute now contains provisions that allow agencies to charge in some cases when they produce records electronically. When agencies produce records in electronic format, they are now allowed to charge what the statute calls the “actual cost” of reproducing those records, which includes:

(i) an amount equal to the hourly salary attributed to the lowest paid employee who has the necessary skill required to prepare a copy of the requested record, if it is more than two hours (if it is less than two hours, no fee may be charged for this);

(ii) the actual cost of the storage devices or media provided to the person making the request (i.e. the disk or other device on which the documents are produced);

(iii) if the agency’s information technology equipment is inadequate to prepare a copy and it engages an outside professional service to prepare a copy, the actual cost of engaging the outside service.
Public Officers Law, § 87(1)(c)(iii). If a person requesting records is going to be charged for either (i) or (iii) above, the person requesting the record must be informed of the estimated cost of preparing a copy of the record, and upon payment or offer to pay, the agency must produce the record.

A recent example of a situation where these provisions might apply is the request that most CUNY colleges have received from the organization “Pick-a-Prof”, seeking data on the distribution of grades given in different CUNY classes. As we have previously advised, this data is required to be disclosed if it can be retrieved with reasonable effort. If the amount of work necessary to produce the record takes more than two hours, the college may now charge the company for the time expended in producing the record. Another example of a situation where these provisions might apply is where a college responds to a FOIL request by scanning documents, and the scanning takes more than two hours.

The recent amendments to FOIL also codified the previously existing rule that an agency may not deny FOIL requests on the ground that they are burdensome, or that the agency lacks resources to respond. Section 89(3)(a) of the Public Officers Law now provides:

An agency may not deny requests on the basis that the request is voluminous or that locating or reviewing the requested records or providing the requested copies is burdensome because the agency lacks sufficient staffing or on any other basis if the agency may engage an outside professional service to provide copying, programming or other services required to provide the copy, the costs of which the agency may recover . . .

However, the statute also makes clear that “preparing a copy shall not include search time or administrative costs.”

6. Disclosure of Lists of Names and Addresses

Prior to the amendments that became effective in August, FOIL already exempted from disclosure names and addresses, where the information was being used for commercial or fundraising purposes. This portion of the statute has been rewritten slightly, including changing the word “commercial” to “solicitation.” The new language is:

An agency may require a person requesting lists of names and addresses to provide a written certification that such person will not use such lists of names and addresses for solicitation or fundraising purposes and will not sell, give or otherwise make available

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1 This provision is somewhat inconsistent with § 87(1)(c)(iii) of the Public Officers Law, cited earlier, which explicitly states that an outside professional service can only be used where the agency’s information technology equipment is inadequate to prepare a copy of a record. Section 89(3)(a) provides that the ability to use and charge an outside professional service is also available where it is necessary to respond to requests for a large volume of information, where the agency has insufficient staffing or for some other reason does not have sufficient resources to produce the requested copies.
such lists of names and addresses to any other person for the purpose of allowing that person to use such lists of names and addresses for solicitation or fund-raising purposes.

Determining whether to provide names and addresses under FOIL depends upon whether the request seeks the names and addresses of employees or students. If the request seeks the names and addresses of employees, the above provisions apply. It should be noted, however, that the Committee on Open Government has in several advisory opinions indicated that it does not consider disclosure of e-mail addresses to be an invasion of personal privacy, as they do not indicate the actual home address of an employee, and may be available under FOIL without the restrictions in this paragraph.

In the case of students, the Committee on Open Government has recognized that FERPA controls the release of directory information under FOIL. See FOIL-AO-12190 (2000). Under FERPA, student names and addresses are directory information which may be made available to third parties if the student has not “opted out” by filing a directory information non-disclosure form with the college registrar. In view of this, no directory information should be supplied for students who have opted out. With respect to other students, it is reasonable to assume that any request from a commercial enterprise, or that is for no stated reason, is for purposes of solicitation and can be denied on that basis. While it is not entirely clear, it would also be reasonable to take the position that student names and addresses are available under FOIL only in accordance with CUNY’s FERPA Guidelines, which requires the requester to have a “legitimate interest” in the information.

7. Summary

As is set forth above, the Freedom of Information Law has been amended in the past few years in an effort to address how electronic documents should be produced and how costs should be apportioned. The current law puts a large burden on public agencies to make documents available to the public electronically and in requested electronic formats. In addition, the time limits for responding to FOIL requests are strict. All this, combined with the fact that any member of the public can request documents under FOIL for any (or no) reason, has resulted in a large burden to the colleges in complying with FOIL requests. Moreover, this memorandum did not address the many decisions that must be made to determine whether records are exempt from disclosure under FOIL’s various exceptions, such as the one for “inter-agency or intra-agency materials.” This inquiry is simply too fact-specific to be dealt with in a general memorandum. However, this office is always available for consultation on these issues.

If you have any questions about this memorandum or about FOIL compliance generally, please contact Katherine Raymond at 212-794-5759 or at katherine.raymond@mail.cuny.edu.

c: Records Access Officers
   Legal Affairs Designees

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Committee on Open Government

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LAW

UPDATED 08/07/08

PUBLIC OFFICERS LAW, ARTICLE 6
SECTIONS 84-90
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION LAW

Section 84. Legislative declaration.
85. Short title.
86. Definitions.
87. Access to agency records.
88. Access to state legislative records.
89. General provisions relating to access to records; certain cases.
90. Severability.

§84. Legislative declaration. The legislature hereby finds that a free society is maintained when
government is responsive and responsible to the public, and when the public is aware of
governmental actions. The more open a government is with its citizenry, the greater the
understanding and participation of the public in government.

As state and local government services increase and public problems become more sophisticated
and complex and therefore harder to solve, and with the resultant increase in revenues and
expenditures, it is incumbent upon the state and its localities to extend public accountability
wherever and whenever feasible.

The people's right to know the process of governmental decision-making and to review the
documents and statistics leading to determinations is basic to our society. Access to such
information should not be thwarted by shrouding it with the cloak of secrecy or confidentiality. The
legislature therefore declares that government is the public's business and that the public,
individually and collectively and represented by a free press, should have access to the records of
government in accordance with the provisions of this article.

§85. Short title. This article shall be known and may be cited as the "Freedom of Information Law."

§86. Definitions. As used in this article, unless the context requires otherwise.

1. "Judiciary" means the courts of the state, including any municipal or district court, whether or not
of record.
2. "State legislature" means the legislature of the state of New York, including any committee,
subcommittee, joint committee, select committee, or commission thereof.
3. "Agency" means any state or municipal department, board, bureau, division, commission,
committee, public authority, public corporation, council, office or other governmental entity
performing a governmental or proprietary function for the state or any one or more municipalities
thereof, except the judiciary or the state legislature.
4. "Record" means any information kept, held, filed, produced or reproduced by, with or for an
agency or the state legislature, in any physical form whatsoever including, but not limited to, reports,
statements, examinations, memoranda, opinions, folders, files, books, manuals, pamphlets, forms,
papers, designs, drawings, maps, photos, letters, microfilms, computer tapes or discs, rules,
regulations or codes.
5. "Critical infrastructure" means systems, assets, places or things, whether physical or virtual, so
vital to the state that the disruption, incapacitation or destruction of such systems, assets, places or
things could jeopardize the health, safety, welfare or security of the state, its residents or its
§87. Access to agency records. 1. (a) Within sixty days after the effective date of this article, the governing body of each public corporation shall promulgate uniform rules and regulations for all agencies in such public corporation pursuant to such general rules and regulations as may be promulgated by the committee on open government in conformity with the provisions of this article, pertaining to the administration of this article.

(b) Each agency shall promulgate rules and regulations, in conformity with this article and applicable rules and regulations promulgated pursuant to the provisions of paragraph (a) of this subdivision, and pursuant to such general rules and regulations as may be promulgated by the committee on open government in conformity with the provisions of this article, pertaining to the availability of records and procedures to be followed, including, but not limited to:

i. the times and places such records are available;

ii. the persons from whom such records may be obtained; and

iii. the fees for copies of records which shall not exceed twenty-five cents per photocopy not in excess of nine inches by fourteen inches, or the actual cost of reproducing any other record in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (c) of this subdivision, except when a different fee is otherwise prescribed by statute.

c. In determining the actual cost of reproducing a record, an agency may include only:

i. an amount equal to the hourly salary attributed to the lowest paid agency employee who has the necessary skill required to prepare a copy of the requested record;

ii. the actual cost of the storage devices or media provided to the person making the request in complying with such request;

iii. the actual cost to the agency of engaging an outside professional service to prepare a copy of a record, but only when an agency’s information technology equipment is inadequate to prepare a copy, if such service is used to prepare the copy; and

iv. preparing a copy shall not include search time or administrative costs, and no fee shall be charged unless at least two hours of agency employee time is needed to prepare a copy of the record requested. A person requesting a record shall be informed of the estimated cost of preparing a copy of the record if more than two hours of an agency employee’s time is needed, or if an outside professional service would be retained to prepare a copy of the record.

2. Each agency shall, in accordance with its published rules, make available for public inspection and copying all records, except that such agency may deny access to records or portions thereof:

(a) are specifically exempted from disclosure by state or federal statute;

(b) if disclosed would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy under the provisions of subdivision two of section eighty-nine of this article;

(c) if disclosed would impair present or imminent contract awards or collective bargaining negotiations;

(d) are trade secrets or are submitted to an agency by a commercial enterprise or derived from information obtained from a commercial enterprise and which if disclosed would cause substantial injury to the competitive position of the subject enterprise;

(e) are compiled for law enforcement purposes and which, if disclosed, would:

i. interfere with law enforcement investigations or judicial proceedings;

ii. deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or impartial adjudication;

iii. identify a confidential source or disclose confidential information relating to a criminal investigation; or

iv. reveal criminal investigative techniques or procedures, except routine techniques and procedures;

(f) if disclosed could endanger the life or safety of any person;

(g) are inter-agency or intra-agency materials which are not:

i. statistical or factual tabulations or data;

ii. instructions to staff that affect the public;

iii. final agency policy or determinations; or

iv. external audits, including but not limited to audits performed by the comptroller and the federal
government; or

(h) are examination questions or answers which are requested prior to the final administration of such questions;
(i) if disclosed, would jeopardize an agency’s capacity to guarantee the security of its information technology assets, such assets encompassing both electronic information systems and infrastructures; or
(j) are photographs, microphotographs, videotape or other recorded images prepared under authority of section eleven hundred eleven-a of the vehicle and traffic law.

3. Each agency shall maintain:
(a) a record of the final vote of each member in every agency proceeding in which the member votes;
(b) a record setting forth the name, public office address, title and salary of every officer or employee of the agency; and
(c) a reasonably detailed current list by subject matter, of all records in the possession of the agency, whether or not available under this article.

4. (a) Each state agency which maintains records containing trade secrets, to which access may be denied pursuant to paragraph (d) of subdivision two of this section, shall promulgate regulations in conformity with the provisions of subdivision five of section eighty-nine of this article pertaining to such records, including, but not limited to the following:

(1) the manner of identifying the records or parts;
(2) the manner of identifying persons within the agency to whose custody the records or parts will be charged and for whose inspection and study the records will be made available;
(3) the manner of safeguarding against any unauthorized access to the records.

(b) As used in this subdivision the term "agency" or "state agency" means only a state department, board, bureau, division, council or office and any public corporation the majority of whose members are appointed by the governor.

(c) Each state agency that maintains a website shall post information related to this article and article six-A of this chapter on its website. Such information shall include, at a minimum, contact information for the persons from whom records of the agency may be obtained, the times and places such records are available for inspection and copying, and information on how to request records in person, by mail, and, if the agency accepts requests for records electronically, by e-mail. This posting shall be linked to the website of the committee on open government.

5. (a) An agency shall provide records on the medium requested by a person, if the agency can reasonably make such copy or have such copy made by engaging an outside professional service. Records provided in a computer format shall not be encrypted.

(b) No agency shall enter into or renew a contract for the creation or maintenance of records if such contract impairs the right of the public to inspect or copy the agency’s records.

§§88. Access to state legislative records. 1. The temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly shall promulgate rules and regulations for their respective houses in conformity with the provisions of this article, pertaining to the availability, location and nature of records, including, but not limited to:

(a) the times and places such records are available;
(b) the persons from whom such records may be obtained;
(c) the fees for copies of such records, which shall not exceed twenty-five cents per photocopy not in excess of nine inches by fourteen inches, or the actual cost of reproducing any other record, except when a different fee is otherwise prescribed by law.

2. The state legislature shall, in accordance with its published rules, make available for public inspection and copying:

(a) bills and amendments thereto, fiscal notes, introducers’ bill memoranda, resolutions and amendments thereto, and index records;
(b) messages received from the governor or the other house of the legislature, and home rule messages;
(c) legislative notification of the proposed adoption of rules by an agency;
(d) transcripts or minutes, if prepared, and journal records of public sessions including meetings of
committees and subcommittees and public hearings, with the records of attendance of members theret and records of any votes taken;
(e) internal or external audits and statistical or factual tabulations of, or with respect to, material otherwise available for public inspection and copying pursuant to this section or any other applicable provision of law;
(f) administrative staff manuals and instructions to staff that affect members of the public;
(g) final reports and formal opinions submitted to the legislature;
(h) final reports or recommendations and minority or dissenting reports and opinions of members of committees, subcommittees, or commissions of the legislature;
(i) any other files, records, papers or documents required by law to be made available for public inspection and copying.

3. Each house shall maintain and make available for public inspection and copying:

(a) a record of votes of each member in every session and every committee and subcommittee meeting in which the member votes;
(b) a record setting forth the name, public office address, title, and salary of every officer or employee; and
(c) a current list, reasonably detailed, by subject matter of any records required to be made available for public inspection and copying pursuant to this section.

§89. General provisions relating to access to records; certain cases. The provisions of this section apply to access to all records, except as hereinafter specified:

1. (a) The committee on open government is continued and shall consist of the lieutenant governor or the delegate of such officer, the secretary of state or the delegate of such officer, whose office shall act as secretariat for the committee, the commissioner of the office of general services or the delegate of such officer, the director of the budget or the delegate of such officer, and seven other persons, none of whom shall hold any other state or local public office except the representative of local governments as set forth herein, to be appointed as follows: five by the governor, at least two of whom are or have been representatives of the news media, one of whom shall be a representative of local government who, at the time of appointment, is serving as a duly elected officer of a local government, one by the temporary president of the senate, and one by the speaker of the assembly. The persons appointed by the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly shall be appointed to serve, respectively, until the expiration of the terms of office of the temporary president and the speaker to which the temporary president and speaker were elected. The four persons presently serving by appointment of the government for fixed terms shall continue to serve until the expiration of their respective terms. Thereafter, their respective successors shall be appointed for terms of four years. The member representing local government shall be appointed for a term of four years, so long as such member shall remain a duly elected officer of a local government. The committee shall hold no less than two meetings annually, but may meet at any time. The members of the committee shall be entitled to reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in the discharge of their duties.

(b) The committee shall:

i. furnish to any agency advisory guidelines, opinions or other appropriate information regarding this article;
ii. furnish to any person advisory opinions or other appropriate information regarding this article;
iii. promulgate rules and regulations with respect to the implementation of subdivision one and paragraph (c) of subdivision three of section eighty-seven of this article;
iv. request from any agency such assistance, services and information as will enable the committee to effectively carry out its powers and duties; and
v. develop a form, which shall be made available on the internet, that may be used by the public to request a record; and
vi. report on its activities and findings regarding articles six and seven of this chapter, including recommendations for changes in the law, to the governor and the legislature annually, on or before December fifteenth.

2. (a) The committee on open government may promulgate guidelines regarding deletion of identifying details or withholding of records otherwise available under this article to prevent unwarranted invasions of personal privacy. In the absence of such guidelines, an agency may delete identifying details when it makes records available.
(b) An unwarranted invasion of personal privacy includes, but shall not be limited to:

i. disclosure of employment, medical or credit histories or personal references of applicants for employment;
ii. disclosure of items involving the medical or personal records of a client or patient in a medical facility;
iii. sale or release of lists of names and addresses if such lists would be used for solicitation or fund-raising purposes;
iv. disclosure of information of a personal nature when disclosure would result in economic or personal hardship to the subject party and such information is not relevant to the work of the agency requesting or maintaining it;
v. disclosure of information of a personal nature reported in confidence to an agency and not relevant to the ordinary work of such agency; or
vi. information of a personal nature contained in a workers’ compensation record, except as provided by section one hundred ten-a of the workers’ compensation law.
(c) Unless otherwise provided by this article, disclosure shall not be construed to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy pursuant to paragraphs (a) and (b) of this subdivision:

i. when identifying details are deleted;
ii. when the person to whom a record pertains consents in writing to disclosure;
iii. when upon presenting reasonable proof of identity a person seeks access to records pertaining to him or her; or
iv. when a record or group of records relates to the right, title or interest in real property, or relates to the inventory, status or characteristics of real property, in which case disclosure and providing copies of such record or group of records shall not be deemed an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

2-a. Nothing in this article shall permit disclosure which constitutes an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy as defined in subdivision two of this section if such disclosure is prohibited under section ninety-six of this chapter.

3. (a) Each entity subject to the provisions of this article, within five business days of the receipt of a written request for a record reasonably described, shall make such record available to the person requesting it, deny such request in writing or furnish a written acknowledgment of the receipt of such request and a statement of the approximate date, which shall be reasonable under the circumstances of the request, when such request will be granted or denied, including, where appropriate, a statement that access to the record will be determined in accordance with subdivision five of this section. An agency shall not deny a request on the basis that the request is voluminous or that locating or reviewing the requested records or providing the requested copies is burdensome because the agency lacks sufficient staffing or on any other basis if the agency may engage an outside professional service to provide copying, programming or other services required to provide the copy, the costs of which the agency may recover pursuant to paragraph (c) of subdivision one of section eighty-seven of this article. An agency may require a person requesting lists of names and addresses to provide a written certification that such person will not use such lists of names and addresses for solicitation or fund-raising purposes and will not sell, give or otherwise make available such lists of names and addresses to any other person for the purpose of allowing that person to use such lists of names and addresses for solicitation or fund-raising purposes. If an agency determines to grant a request in whole or in part and if circumstances prevent disclosure to the person requesting the record or records within twenty business days from the date of the acknowledgement of the receipt of the request, the agency shall, in writing, both the reason for the inability to grant the request within twenty business days and a date certain within a reasonable period, depending on the circumstances, when the request will be granted in whole or in part. Upon payment of, or offer to pay, the fee prescribed therefor, the entity shall provide a copy of such record and certify to the correctness of such copy if so requested, or as the case may be, shall certify that it does not have possession of such record or that such record cannot be found after diligent search.

Nothing in this article shall be construed to require any entity to prepare any record not possessed or maintained by such entity except the records specified in subdivision three of section eighty-seven and subdivision three of section eighty-eight of this article. When an agency has the ability to retrieve or extract a record or data maintained in a computer storage system with reasonable effort, it shall be required to do so. When doing so requires less employee time than engaging in manual retrieval or redactions from non-electronic records, the agency shall be required to retrieve or extract such record or data electronically. Any programming necessary to retrieve a record maintained in a computer storage system and to transfer that record to the medium requested by a person or to allow the transferred record to be read or printed shall not be deemed to be the preparation or creation of a new record.

(b) All entities shall, provided such entity has reasonable means available, accept requests for records submitted in the form of electronic mail and shall respond to such requests by electronic mail, using forms, to the extent practicable, consistent with the form or forms developed by the committee on open government pursuant to subdivision one of this section and provided that the written requests do not seek a response in some other form.

http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/foil2.htm
11/26/2008
4. (a) Except as provided in subdivision five of this section, any person denied access to a record may within thirty days appeal in writing such denial to the head, chief executive or governing body of the entity, or the person therefor designated by such head, chief executive, or governing body, who shall within ten business days of the receipt of such appeal fully explain in writing to the person requesting the record the reasons for further denial, or provide access to the record sought. In addition, each agency shall immediately forward to the committee on open government a copy of such appeal when received by the agency and the ensuing determination thereon. Failure by an agency to conform to the provisions of subdivision three of this section shall constitute a denial.

(b) Except as provided in subdivision five of this section, a person denied access to a record in an appeal determination under the provisions of paragraph (a) of this subdivision may bring a proceeding for review of such denial pursuant to article seventy-eight of the civil practice law and rules. In the event that access to any record is denied pursuant to the provisions of subdivision two of section eighty-seven of this article, the agency involved shall have the burden of proving that such record falls within the provisions of such subdivision two. Failure by an agency to conform to the provisions of paragraph (a) of this subdivision shall constitute a denial.

(c) The court in such a proceeding may assess, against such agency involved, reasonable attorney’s fees and other litigation costs reasonably incurred by such person in any case under the provisions of this section in which such person has substantially prevailed, when:

i. the agency had no reasonable basis for denying access; or
ii. the agency failed to respond to a request or appeal within the statutory time.

5. (a) (1) A person acting pursuant to law or regulation who, subsequent to the effective date of this subdivision, submits any information to any state agency may, at the time of submission, request that the agency except such information from disclosure under paragraph (d) of subdivision two of section eighty-seven of this article. Where the request itself contains information which if disclosed would defeat the purpose for which the exception is sought, such information shall also be excepted from disclosure.

(1-a) A person or entity who submits or otherwise makes available any records to any agency, may, at any time, identify those records or portions thereof that may contain critical infrastructure information, and request that the agency that maintains such records except such information from disclosure under subdivision two of section eighty-seven of this article. Where the request itself contains information which if disclosed would defeat the purpose for which the exception is sought, such information shall also be excepted from disclosure.

(2) The request for an exception shall be in writing and state the reasons why the information should be excepted from disclosure.

(3) Information submitted as provided in subparagraphs one and one-a of this paragraph shall be excepted from disclosure and be maintained apart by the agency from all other records until fifteen days after the entitlement to such exception has been finally determined or such further time as ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction.

(b) On the initiative of the agency at any time, or upon the request of any person for a record excepted from disclosure pursuant to this subdivision, the agency shall:

(1) inform the person who requested the exception of the agency’s intention to determine whether such exception should be granted or continued;
(2) permit the person who requested the exception, within ten business days of notification from the agency, to submit a written statement of the necessity for the granting or continuation of such exception;
(3) within seven-business days of receipt of such written statement, or within seven business days of the expiration of the period prescribed for submission of such statement, issue a written determination granting, continuing or terminating such exception and stating the reasons therefor; copies of such determination shall be served upon the person, if any, requesting the record, the person who requested the exception, and the committee on open government.

(c) A denial of an exception from disclosure under paragraph (b) of this subdivision may be appealed by the person submitting the information and a denial of access to the record may be appealed by the person requesting the record in accordance with this subdivision.

(1) Within seven business days of receipt of written notice denying the request, the person may file a written appeal from the determination of the agency with the head of the agency, the chief executive officer or governing body or their designated representatives.
(2) The appeal shall be determined within ten business days of the receipt of the appeal. Written notice of the determination shall be served upon the person, if any, requesting the record, the
person who requested the exception and the committee on public access to records. The notice shall contain a statement of the reasons for the determination.

(d) A proceeding to review an adverse determination pursuant to paragraph (c) of this subdivision may be commenced pursuant to article seventy-eight of the civil practice law and rules. Such proceeding, when brought by a person seeking an exception from disclosure pursuant to this subdivision, must be commenced within fifteen days of the service of the written notice containing the adverse determination provided for in subparagraph two of paragraph (c) of this subdivision.

(e) The person requesting an exception from disclosure pursuant to this subdivision shall in all proceedings have the burden of proving entitlement to the exception.

(f) Where the agency denies access to a record pursuant to paragraph (d) of subdivision two of section eighty-seven of this article, the agency shall have the burden of proving that the record falls within the provisions of such exception.

(g) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to deny any person access, pursuant to the remaining provisions of this article, to any record or part excepted from disclosure upon the express written consent of the person who had requested the exception.

(h) As used in this subdivision the term "agency" or "state agency" means only a state department, board, bureau, division, council or office and any public corporation the majority of whose members are appointed by the governor.

6. Nothing in this article shall be construed to limit or abridge any otherwise available right of access at law or in equity of any party to records.

7. Nothing in this article shall require the disclosure of the home address of an officer or employee, former officer or employee, or of a retiree of a public employees' retirement system, nor shall anything in this article require the disclosure of the name or home address of a beneficiary of a public employees' retirement system or of an applicant for appointment to public employment; provided however, that nothing in this subdivision shall limit or abridge the right of an employee organization, certified or recognized for any collective negotiating unit of an employer pursuant to article fourteen of the civil service law, to obtain the name or home address of any officer, employee or retiree of such employer, if such name or home address is otherwise available under this article.

8. Any person who, with intent to prevent public inspection of a record pursuant to this article, willfully conceals or destroys any such record shall be guilty of a violation.

9. When records maintained electronically include items of information that would be available under this article, as well as items of information that may be withheld, an agency in designing its information retrieval methods, whenever practicable and reasonable, shall do so in a manner that permits the segregation and retrieval of available items in order to provide maximum public access.

§90. Severability. If any provision of this article or the application thereof to any person or circumstances is adjudged invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, such judgment shall not affect or impair the validity of the other provisions of the article or the application thereof to other persons and circumstances.

For further information, contact: Committee on Open Government, NYS Department of State, One Commerce Plaza, 59 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY 12231