

A Quick Guide to the Mississippi Public Records Act

The Mississippi Code of 1972 Title 25 Chapter 61 establishes the Mississippi Public Records Act. It is the policy of the Legislature that public records must be available for inspection by any person unless otherwise provided by this act [Laws, 1996, ch. 453]. Furthermore, providing access to public records is a duty of each public body, and automation of public records must not erode the right of access to those records. As each agency increases its use of and dependence on electronic recordkeeping, each agency must ensure reasonable access to records electronically maintained, subject to the rules of records retention [Laws, 1996, ch. 453].

- All documents and other records, regardless of form, related to government business are public records. There are specific exemptions allowed under the law as well as items that must be redacted.
- A public records request must be an identifiable record. List of questions or request for information is not a proper public record request.
- Unless a public body has adopted a public records policy, request must be responded to within 1 working day. A public body may adopt a policy allowing up to 7 working days to respond.
- All communication related to a public records request should be in writing.
- A public body may require prepayment of reasonably calculated actual costs of searching, reviewing, redacting, duplicating, and mailing public records. An estimate of the cost should be provided to the requestor and a prepayment should be made before incurring the cost to produce the record.
- Trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information provided by third parties may be exempt from disclosure. See specific procedures for handling these types of records.
- All public records should be reviewed to ensure exempted records are redacted and not included. For example, personnel records, attorney work product, investigative reports, etc.
- A public body can supply reasonable access to records by making them publicly available and open to physical inspection or on its website.
- Text messages and emails sent from personal cell phones and/or computers in which official business is discussed are considered public records and are subject to public records request.
- The Mississippi Ethics Commission supplies the enforcement procedure for failure to follow the Public Records Act. The penalty for wrongful denial can include being civilly liable in a personal capacity in a sum not to exceed \$100 per violation, plus all reasonable expenses incurred by such person bringing the proceeding.

All public employees are encouraged to be fully aware of the complete Mississippi Public Records Act and any local public records policies adopted by the governing body. The [Mississippi Ethics Commission](#) supplies example Mississippi Model Public Records Rules, issues orders from complaints, and other resources related to public records.

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By **Jason Camp**, PhD, Extension Specialist II, Center for Government and Community Development.



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