

APPENDIX A

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

Editor's Note. Act No. 118, of the 1987 South Carolina Legislature repealed Chapter 3 of Title 30 of the 1976 South Carolina Code of Laws, (commonly called the "Freedom of Information Act"). Numerous changes to the act have been made since its initial passage, and this appendix is current through the 2002 legislative session.

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§30-4-10. Short Title.

This Chapter shall be known and cited as the "Freedom of Information Act."

§30-4-15. Findings and Purpose.

The General Assembly finds that it is vital in a democratic society that public business be performed in an open and public manner so that citizens shall be advised of the performance of public officials and of the decisions that are reached in public activity and in the formulation of public policy. Toward this end, provisions of this chapter must be construed so as to make it possible for citizens, or their representatives, to learn and report fully the activities of their public officials at a minimum cost or delay to the persons seeking access to public documents or meetings.

§30-4-20. Definitions.

(a) "Public body" means any department of the State, and state board, commission, agency, and authority, any public or governmental body or political subdivision of the State, including counties, municipalities, townships, school districts, and special purpose districts, or any organization, corporation, or agency supported in whole or in part by public funds or expending public funds, including committees, subcommittees, advisory committees, and the like of any such body by whatever name known, and includes any quasi-governmental body of the State and its political subdivisions, including, without limitation, bodies such as the South Carolina Public Service Authority and the South Carolina State Ports Authority. Committees of health care facilities, which are subject to this Chapter, for medical staff disciplinary proceedings, quality assurance, peer review, including the medical staff credentialing process, specific medical case review, and self-evaluation are not public bodies for the purpose of this Chapter.

(b) "Person" includes any individual, corporation, partnership, firm, organization or association.

(c) "Public record" includes all books, papers, maps, photographs, cards, tapes, recordings, or other documentary materials regardless of physical form or characteristics prepared, owned, used in the possession of, or retained by a public body. Records such as income tax returns, medical records, hospital medical staff reports, scholastic records, adoption records, records related to registration, and circulation of library materials which contain names or other personally identifying details regarding the users of public, private, school, college, technical college, university, and state institutional libraries and library systems, supported in whole or in part by public funds or expending public funds, or records which reveal the identity of the library patron checking out or requesting an item from the library or using other library services, except nonidentifying administrative and statistical reports of registration and circulation, and other records which by law are required to be closed to the public are not considered to be made open to the public under the provisions of this act. Nothing herein authorizes or requires the disclosure of those records where the public body, prior to January 20, 1987, by a favorable vote of three-fourths of the membership, taken after receipt of a written request, concluded that the public interest was best served by not disclosing them. Nothing herein authorizes or requires the disclosure of records of the Board of Financial Institutions pertaining to applications and surveys for charters and branches of banks and savings and loan associations or surveys and examinations of the institutions required to be made by law.

(d) "Meeting" means the convening of a quorum of the constituent membership of a public body, whether corporal or by means of electronic equipment, to discuss or act upon a matter over which the public body has supervision, control, jurisdiction or advisory power.

(e) "Quorum" unless otherwise defined by applicable law means a simple majority of the constituent membership of a public body.

§30-4-30. Right to inspect or copy public records; fees; notification as to public availability of records.

(a) Any person has a right to inspect or copy any public record of a public body, except as otherwise provided by §30-4-40, in accordance with reasonable rules concerning time and place of access.

(b) The public body may establish and collect fees not to exceed the actual cost of searching for or making copies of records. Fees charged by a public body must be uniform for copies of the same record or document. However, members of the General Assembly may receive copies of records or documents at no charge from public bodies when their request relates to their legislative duties. Such records shall be furnished at the lowest possible cost to the person requesting the records. Records shall be provided in a form that is both convenient and practical for use by the person requesting copies of the records concerned, if it is equally convenient for such public body to provide the records in such form. Documents may be furnished when appropriate without charge or at a reduced charge where the agency determines that waiver or reduction of the fee is in the public interest because furnishing the information can be considered as primarily benefiting the general public. Fees shall not be charged for examination and review to determine if such documents are subject to disclosure. Nothing in this chapter shall prevent the custodian of the public records from charging a reasonable hourly rate for making records available to the public nor requiring a reasonable deposit of such costs prior to searching for or making copies of the records.

(c) Each public body, upon written request for records made under this chapter, shall within fifteen days (excepting Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) of the receipt of any such request notify the person making such request of its determination and the reasons therefor. Such a determination shall constitute the final opinion of the public body as to the public availability of the requested public record and, if the request is granted, the record must be furnished or made available for inspection or copying. If written notification of the determination of the public body as to the availability of the requested public record is neither mailed nor personally delivered to the person requesting the document within the fifteen days allowed herein, the request must be considered approved.

(d) The following records of a public body must be available for public inspection and copying during the hours of operations of the public body without the requestor being required to make a written request to inspect or copy the records when the requestor appears in person:

- (1) minutes of the meetings of the public body for the preceding six months;
- (2) all reports identified in Section 30-4-50(A)(8) for at least the fourteen-day period before the current day; and
- (3) documents identifying persons confined in any jail, detention center, or prison for the preceding three months.

§30-4-40. Disclosures.

(a) A public body may but is not required to disclose the following information.

(1) Trade secrets, which are defined as unpatented, secret, commercially valuable plans, appliances, formulas, or processes, which are used for the making, preparing, compounding, treating, or processing of articles or materials which are trade commodities obtained from a person and which are generally recognized as confidential; and work products, in whole or in part collected or produced for sale or resale, and paid subscriber information. Trade secrets also include, for those public bodies who market services or products in competition with others, feasibility, planning, and marketing studies, and evaluations and other materials which contain references to potential customers, competitive information, or evaluation.

(*) All materials, regardless of form, gathered by a public body during a search to fill an employment position, except that materials relating to not fewer than the final three applicants under consideration for a position must be made available for public inspection and copying. In addition to making available for public inspection and copying the materials described in this item, the public body must disclose, upon request, the number of applicants considered for a position. For the purpose of this item 'materials relating to not fewer than the final three applicants' do not include an applicants income tax returns, medical records, social security number, or information otherwise exempt from disclosure by this section.

(*) (Editor's Note. At the time of this publication, no number had been assigned.)

(A) Data, records, or information of a proprietary nature, produced or collected by or for faculty or staff of state institutions of higher education in the conduct of or as a result of study or research on commercial, scientific, technical, or scholarly issues, whether sponsored by the institution alone or in conjunction with a governmental body or private concern, where the data, records, or information has not been publicly released, published, copyrighted, or patented.

(B) Any data, records, or information developed collected, or received by or on behalf of faculty, staff, employees, or students of a state institution of higher education or any public or private entity supporting or participating in the activities of a state institution of higher education in the conduct of or as a result of study or research on medical, scientific, technical, scholarly, or artistic issues, whether sponsored by the institution alone or in conjunction with a governmental body or private entity until the information is published, patented, otherwise publicly disseminated, or released to an agency whereupon the request must be made to the agency. This item, applies to, but is not limited to, information provided by participants in research, research notes and data, discoveries, research projects, proposals, methodologies, protocols, and creative works.

(C) The identity, or information tending to reveal the identity, of any individual who in good faith makes a complaint or otherwise discloses information, which alleges a violation or potential violation of law or regulation, to a state regulatory agency.

(D) The exemptions in this item do not extend to the institution's financial or administrative records.

(2) Information of a personal nature where the public disclosure thereof would constitute unreasonable invasion of personal privacy. Information of a personal nature shall include, but not be limited to, information as to gross receipts contained in applications for business licenses and information relating to public records which include the name, address, and telephone number or other such information of an individual or individuals who are handicapped or disabled when the information is requested for person-to person commercial solicitation of handicapped persons solely by virtue of their handicap. This provision must not be interpreted to restrict access by the public and press to information contained in public records.

(3) Records of law enforcement and public safety agencies not otherwise available by law that were compiled in the process of detecting and investigating crime if the disclosure of the information would harm the agency by:

- (A) Disclosing identity of informants not otherwise known;
- (B) The premature release of information to be used in a prospective law enforcement action;
- (C) Disclosing investigatory techniques not otherwise known outside the government;
- (D) By endangering the life, health, or property of any person.

(4) Matters specifically exempted from disclosure by statute or law.

(5) Documents of and documents incidental to proposed contractual arrangements and documents of and documents incidental to proposed sales or purchases of property; however:

(A) these documents are not exempt from disclosure once a contract is entered into or the property is sold or purchased except as otherwise provided in this section;

(B) a contract for the sale or purchase of real estate shall remain exempt from disclosure until the deed is executed, but this exemption applies only to those contracts of sale or purchase where the execution of the deed occurs within twelve months from the date of sale or purchase;

(C) confidential proprietary information provided to a public body for economic development or contract negotiations purposes is not required to be disclosed.

(6) All compensation paid by public bodies except as follows:

- (A) For those persons receiving compensation of fifty thousand dollars or more annually, for all part-time employees, for any other persons who are paid honoraria or other compensation for special appearances, performances or the like, and for employees at the level of agency or department head, the exact compensation of each person or employee;
- (B) For classified and unclassified employees, including contract instructional employees, not subject to item (A) above who receive compensation between, but not including, thirty thousand dollars and fifty thousand dollars annually, the compensation level within a range of four thousand dollars, such ranges to commence at thirty thousand dollars and increase in increments of four thousand dollars;
- (C) For classified employees not subject to item (A) above who receive compensation of thirty thousand dollars or less annually, the salary schedule showing the compensation range for that classification including longevity steps, where applicable;
- (D) For unclassified employees, including contract instructional employees, not subject to item (A) above who receive compensation of thirty thousand dollars or less annually, the compensation level within a range of four thousand dollars, such ranges to commence at two thousand dollars and increase in increments of four thousand dollars.
- (E) For purposes of this subsection (6), "agency head" or "department head" means any person who has authority and responsibility for any department, of any institution, board, commission, council, division, bureau, center, school, hospital, or other facility that is a unit of a public body.

(7) Correspondence or work product of legal counsel for a public body and any other material that would violate attorney-client relationships.

(8) Memoranda, correspondence, and working papers in the possession of individual members of the General Assembly or their immediate staffs; however, nothing herein may be construed as limiting or restricting public access to source documents or records, factual data or summaries of factual data, papers, minutes, or reports otherwise considered to be public information under the provisions of this Chapter and not specifically exempted by any other provisions of this Chapter.

(9) Memoranda, correspondence, documents, and working papers relative to efforts or activities of a public body to attract business or industry to invest within South Carolina.

(10) Any standards used or to be used by the South Carolina Revenue and Taxation for the selection of returns for examination, or data used or to be used for determining such standards, if the Commission determines that such disclosure would seriously impair assessment, collection, or enforcement under the tax laws of this State.

(11) Information relative to the identity of the maker of a gift to a public body if the maker specifies that his making of the gift must be anonymous and that his identity must not be revealed as a condition of making the gift. For the purposes of this item, "gift to a public body" includes, but is not limited to, gifts to any of the state-supported colleges or universities and museums. With respect to the gifts, only information which identifies the maker may be exempt from disclosure. If the maker of any gift or any member of his immediate family has any business transaction with the recipient of the gift within three years before or after the gift is made, the identity of the maker is not exempt from disclosure.

(b) If any public record contains material which is not exempt under subsection (a) of this section, the public body shall separate the exempt and nonexempt material available in accordance with the requirements of this Chapter.

§30-4-50. Certain matters declared public information.

a. Without limiting the meaning of other Sections of this Chapter, the following categories of information are specifically made public information subject to the restrictions and limitations of §30-4-20, §30-4-40 and §30-4-70 of this Chapter:

(1) The names, sex, race, title and dates of employment of all employees and officers of public bodies;

(2) Administrative staff manuals and instructions to staff that affect a member of the public;

(3) Final opinions, including concurring and dissenting opinions, as well as orders, made in the adjudication of cases;

(4) Those statements of policy and interpretations of policy, statute and the Constitution which have been adopted by the public body;

(5) Written planning policies and goals and final planning decisions;

(6) Information in or taken from any account, voucher or contract dealing with the receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by public bodies;

(7) The minutes of all proceedings of all public bodies and all votes at such proceedings, with the exception of all such minutes and votes taken at meetings closed to the public pursuant to 30-4-70;

(8) Reports which disclose the nature, substance, and location of any crime or alleged crime reported as having been committed. Where a report contains information exempt as otherwise provided by law, the law enforcement agency may delete that information from the report.

(9) Statistical and other empirical findings considered by the Legislative Audit Council in the development of an audit report.

b. No information contained in a police incident report or in an employee salary schedule revealed in response to a request pursuant to this chapter may be utilized for commercial solicitation. Also, the home addresses and home telephone numbers of employees and officers of public bodies revealed in response to a request pursuant to this chapter may not be utilized for commercial solicitation. However, this provision must not be interpreted to restrict access by the public and press to information contained in public records.

§30-4-60. Meetings of public bodies shall be open.

Every meeting of all public bodies shall be open to the public unless closed pursuant to §30-4-70 of this Chapter.

§30-4-70. Meetings which may be closed; procedure; circumvention of chapter; disruption of meeting; executive sessions of General Assembly.

(a) A public body may hold a meeting closed to the public for one or more of the following reasons:

(1) Discussion of employment, appointment, compensation, promotion, demotion, discipline, or release of an employee, a student, or a person regulated by a public body or the appointment of a person to a public body; however, if an adversary hearing involving the employee or client is held, the employee or client has the right to demand that the hearing be conducted publicly. Nothing contained in this item shall prevent the public body, in its discretion, from deleting the names of the other employees or clients whose records are submitted for use at the hearing.

(2) Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements and proposed sale or purchase of property, the receipt of legal advice, where the legal advice related to a pending, threatened or potential claim or other matters covered by the attorney-client privilege, settlement of legal claims, or the position of the public agency in other adversary situations involving the assertion against said agency of a claim.

(3) Discussion regarding the development of security personnel or devices.

(4) Investigative proceedings regarding allegations of criminal misconduct.

(5) Discussion of matters relating to the proposed location, expansion, or the provision of services encouraging location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body.

(6) Before going into executive session the public agency shall vote in public on the question and when such vote is favorable the presiding officer shall announce the specific purpose of the executive session. As used in this subsection, "specific purpose" means a description of the matter to be discussed as identified in items (1) through (5) of subsection (a) of this section. However, when the executive session is held pursuant to §30-4-70 (a)(1) or §30-4-70(a)(5), the identity of the individual or entity being discussed is not required to be disclosed to satisfy the requirement that the specific purpose of the executive session to be stated. No action may be taken in executive session except (a) to adjourn or (b) to return to public session. The members of a public body may not commit the public body to a course of action by a polling of members in executive session.

(b) No chance meeting, social meeting, or electronic communication may be used in circumvention of the spirit of requirements of this chapter to act upon a matter over which the public body has supervision, control, jurisdiction, or advisory power.

(c) This chapter does not prohibit the removal of any person who willfully disrupts a meeting to the extent that orderly conduct of the meeting is seriously compromised.

(d) Sessions of the General Assembly may enter into executive sessions authorized by the Constitution of this State and rules adopted pursuant thereto.

§30-4-80. Notice of Meeting of Public Bodies.

(a) All public bodies, except as provided in subsections (b) and (c) of this section, must give written public notice of their regular meetings at the beginning of each calendar year. The notice must include the dates, times, and places of such meetings. Agendas, if any, for regularly scheduled meetings must be posted on a bulletin board at the office or meeting place of the public body at least twenty-four hours prior to such meetings. All public bodies must post on such bulletin board public notice for any called, special, or rescheduled meetings. Such notice must be posted as early as is practicable but not later than twenty-four hours before the meeting. The notice must include the agenda, date, time, and place of the meeting. This requirement does not apply to emergency meetings of public bodies.

(b) Legislative committees must post their meeting times during weeks of the regular session of the General Assembly and must comply with the provisions for notice of special meetings during those weeks when the General Assembly is not in session. Subcommittees of standing legislative committees must give notice during weeks of the legislative session only if it is practicable to do so.

(c) Subcommittees, other than legislative subcommittees, of committees required to give notice under subsection (a), must make reasonable and timely efforts to give notice of their meetings.

(d) Written public notice must include but need not be limited to posting a copy of the notice at the principle office of the public body holding the meeting or, if no such office exists, at the building in which the meeting is to be held.

(e) All public bodies shall notify persons or organizations, local news media, or such other news media as may request notification of the times, dates, places, and agenda of all public meetings, whether scheduled, rescheduled, or called, and the efforts made to comply with this requirement must be noted in the minutes of the meetings.

§30-4-90. Minutes of Meetings of Public Bodies.

(a) All public bodies shall keep written minutes of all of their public meetings. Such minutes shall include but need not be limited to:

(1) The date, time, and place of the meeting.

(2) The members of the public body recorded as either present or absent.

(3) The substance of all matters proposed, discussed or decided and, at the request of any member, a record, by an individual member, of any votes taken.

(4) Any other information that any member of the public body requests be included or reflected in the minutes.

(b) The minutes shall be public records and shall be available within a reasonable time after the meeting except where such disclosures would be inconsistent with §30-4-70 of this chapter.

(c) All or any part of a meeting of a public body may be recorded by any person in attendance by means of a tape recorder or any other means of sonic reproduction, except when a meeting is closed pursuant to §30-4-70 of this chapter, provided that in so recording there is no active interference with the conduct of the meeting. Provided, further, that the public body shall not be required to furnish recording facilities or equipment.

§30-4-100. Injunctive Relief; Costs and Attorney's Fees.

(a) Any citizen of the State may apply to the circuit court for either or both a declaratory judgment and injunctive relief to enforce the provisions of this chapter in appropriate cases as long as such application is made no later than one year following the date on which the alleged violation occurs or one year after a public vote in public session, whichever comes later. The court may order equitable relief as it considers appropriate, and a violation of this chapter must be considered to be an irreparable injury for which no adequate remedy at law exists.

(b) If a person or entity seeking such relief prevails, he or it may be awarded reasonable attorney fees and other costs of litigation. If such person or entity prevails in part, the court may in its discretion award him or it reasonable attorney fees or an appropriate portion thereof.

§30-4-110. Penalties.

Any person or group of persons who willfully violates the provisions of this chapter shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction shall be fined not more than one hundred dollars or imprisoned for not more than thirty days for the first offense, shall be fined not more than two hundred dollars or imprisoned for not more than sixty days for the second offense and shall be fined three hundred dollars or imprisoned for not more than ninety days for the third or subsequent offense.

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