

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO

PETITION FOR WRIT OF MANDAMUS

Joshua Tolento Pro se
6272 Saginaw Rd. #1012
Grand Blanc, MI 48439

Pro se

Relator,

V.

The City of Fostoria
213 S. Main Street,
Fostoria, OH 44830

Respondent

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Statement of Facts

1.) Realtor made a public records request in pursuant of the Ohio Public Records Act was electronically submitted to The City of Fostoria on October 3rd, 2023.

The information requested includes:

BALANCE SHEETS: July 1st - Sep 31st 2023.

GENERAL LEDGER: Jul 1st - Sep 31st 2023.

BANK TRANSACTIONS: July 1st - Sep 31st.

These items have NOT been electronically received as requested.

2.) On October 4th, 2023 the City Law Director responded to confirm receipt of my request which included “A few things of note, the Finance Department is still working on fulfilling your previous requests, so we appreciate your patience.”

Realtor’s previous requests pertaining to the Finance Department included:

- 1. (9/21/23) Correspondences regarding Portage Park for dates 01/01/23 - 09/21/23**
- 2. (9/21/23) Correspondences regarding Fostoria Reservoirs for dates 05/01/23 - 09/21/23**
- 3. (9/25/23) Correspondences regarding Findlay St. construction for dates. 01/01/22 - 09/23/23**

***All items have been partially received by Realtor.**

For comparison purpose Relator requested Parks & Rec. Budget Reports from The City of Tiffin, OH & The City of Findlay, OH. Relator received documents from both cities in less than 8hrs.

Remedy Sought

1. Court ordered release of the following originally requested documents:

BALANCE SHEETS: July 1st - Sep 31st 2023.

GENERAL LEDGER: Jul 1st - Sep 31st 2023.

BANK TRANSACTIONS: July 1st - Sep 31st.

2. Court ordered improvement of The City of Fostoria's public records availability in a timely manner.

3. The prompt release of ALL financial documents upon future request of the Realtor.

Affidavit

State of Ohio

County of Seneca

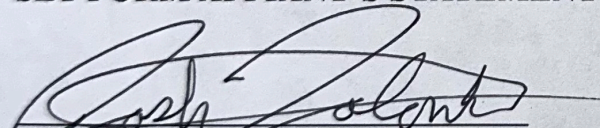
BEFORE ME, THE UNDERSIGNED NOTARY Deborah S. Shaull, ON THIS 25th DAY OF October, 2023, PERSONALLY APPEARED JOSHUA TOLENTO, KNOWN TO ME TO BE A CREDIBLE PERSON OF LAWFUL AGE, WHO IS BEING BY ME FIRST DULY SWORN, ON _____ OATH, DEPOSES AND SAYS:

I REQUESTED FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS FROM THE CITY OF FOSTORIA ON OCT. 3RD, 2023. THESE ARE CURRENTLY INACCESSIBLE AND HAVE NOT BEEN ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED IN A TIMELY MANNER AS REQUESTED. AT THE 10/17/23 CITY COUNCIL MEETING, A RESIDENT SPOKE IN CONCERN ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO FIND CITY BUDGET REPORTS FOR PARKS & REC.

THE LAST EXPLANATION FOR THE DELAY WAS: THE LAW DIRECTOR WHO SAID "THE FINANCE DPT IS WORKING ON FULFILLING YOUR PREVIOUS REQUESTS" ON OCT. 4TH 2023. THE PREVIOUS REQUESTS ARE NOT BROAD AND SOME DOCUMENTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN SENT.

A FOLLOWUP EMAIL WAS SENT ON OCTOBER 24TH 2023 REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE REQUESTED FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS. THIS EMAIL WAS IGNORED AND OTHER EMAILS WERE ANSWERED. NO DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED PRIOR TO THE DATE OF FILING.

SET FORM AFFIANT'S STATEMENT OF FACTS

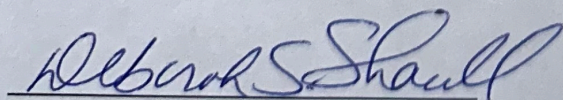

SIGNATURE OF AFFIANT

JOSHUA TOLENTO
TYPED NAME

6272 SAGINAW RD. #1012, GRAND BLANC, MI 48439
ADDRESS OF AFFIANT

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME THIS 25th DAY OF October, 2023.

NOTARY SEAL:



NAME & SIGNATURE

NOTARY PUBLIC

MY COMMISSION EXPIRES: 12/10, 2025.

DEBORAH S. SHAULL
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF OHIO
My Commission Expires 12/10/25



Table of Authorities

U.S. Constitution First Amendment

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution passed by Congress September 25, 1789. Ratified December 15, 1791.

Ohio Public Records Act

Ohio Revised Code Section 149.43 (B)

(B)(1) Upon request by any person and subject to division (B)(8) of this section, 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. If a public record contains information that is exempt from the duty to permit public inspection or to copy the public record, the public office or the person responsible for the public record shall make available all of the information within the public record that is not exempt. When making that public record available for public inspection or copying that public record, the public office or the person responsible for the public record shall notify the requester of any redaction or make the redaction plainly visible. A redaction shall be deemed a denial of a request to inspect or copy the redacted information, except if federal or state law authorizes or requires a public office to make the redaction. When the auditor of state receives a request to inspect or to make a copy of a record that was provided to the auditor of state for purposes of an audit, but the original public office has asserted to the auditor of state that the record is not a public record, the auditor of state may handle the requests by directing the requestor to the original public office that provided the record to the auditor of state.

(2) To facilitate broader access to public records, a public office or the person responsible for public records shall organize and maintain public records in a manner that they can be made available for inspection or copying in accordance with division (B) of this section. A public office also shall have available a copy of its current records retention schedule at a location readily available to the public. If a requester makes an ambiguous or overly broad request or has difficulty in making a request for copies or inspection of public records under this section such that the public office or the person

responsible for the requested public record cannot reasonably identify what public records are being requested, the public office or the person responsible for the requested public record may deny the request but shall provide the requester with an opportunity to revise the request by informing the requester of the manner in which records are maintained by the public office and accessed in the ordinary course of the public office's or person's duties.

(3) If a request is ultimately denied, in part or in whole, the public office or the person responsible for the requested public record shall provide the requester with an explanation, including legal authority, setting forth why the request was denied. If the initial request was provided in writing, the explanation also shall be provided to the requester in writing. The explanation shall not preclude the public office or the person responsible for the requested public record from relying upon additional reasons or legal authority in defending an action commenced under division (C) of this section.

(4) Unless specifically required or authorized by state or federal law or in accordance with division (B) of this section, no public office or person responsible for public records may limit or condition the availability of public records by requiring disclosure of the requester's identity or the intended use of the requested public record. Any requirement that the requester disclose the requester's identity or the intended use of the requested public record constitutes a denial of the request.

(5) A public office or person responsible for public records may ask a requester to make the request in writing, may ask for the requester's identity, and may inquire about the intended use of the information requested, but may do so only after disclosing to the requester that a written request is not mandatory, that the requester may decline to reveal the requester's identity or the intended use, and when a written request or disclosure of the identity or intended use would benefit the requester by enhancing the ability of the public office or person responsible for public records to identify, locate, or deliver the public records sought by the requester.

(6) If any person requests a copy of a public record in accordance with division (B) of this section, the public office or person responsible for the public record may require the requester to pay in advance the cost involved in providing the copy of the public record in accordance with the choice made by the requester under this division. The public office or the person responsible for the public record shall permit the requester to choose to have the public record duplicated upon paper, upon the same medium upon which the public office or person responsible for the public record keeps it, or upon any other medium upon which the public office or person responsible for the public record determines that it reasonably can be duplicated as an integral part of the normal operations of the public office or person responsible for the public record.

When the requester makes a choice under this division, the public office or person responsible for the public record shall provide a copy of it in accordance with the choice made by the requester. Nothing in this section requires a public office or person responsible for the public record to allow the requester of a copy of the public record to make the copies of the public record.

(7)(a) Upon a request made in accordance with division (B) of this section and subject to division (B)(6) of this section, a public office or person responsible for public records shall transmit a copy of a public record to any person by United States mail or by any other means of delivery or transmission within a reasonable period of time after receiving the request for the copy. The public office or person responsible for the public record may require the person making the request to pay in advance the cost of postage if the copy is transmitted by United States mail or the cost of delivery if the copy is transmitted other than by United States mail, and to pay in advance the costs incurred for other supplies used in the mailing, delivery, or transmission.

(b) Any public office may adopt a policy and procedures that it will follow in transmitting, within a reasonable period of time after receiving a request, copies of public records by United States mail or by any other means of delivery or transmission pursuant to division (B)(7) of this section. A public office that adopts a policy and procedures under division (B)(7) of this section shall comply with them in performing its duties under that division.

(c) In any policy and procedures adopted under division (B)(7) of this section:

(i) A public office may limit the number of records requested by a person that the office will physically deliver by United States mail or by another delivery service to ten per month, unless the person certifies to the office in writing that the person does not intend to use or forward the requested records, or the information contained in them, for commercial purposes;

(ii) A public office that chooses to provide some or all of its public records on a web site that is fully accessible to and searchable by members of the public at all times, other than during acts of God outside the public office's control or maintenance, and that charges no fee to search, access, download, or otherwise receive records provided on the web site, may limit to ten per month the number of records requested by a person that the office will deliver in a digital format, unless the requested records are not provided on the web site and unless the person certifies to the office in writing that the person does not intend to use or forward the requested records, or the information contained in them, for commercial purposes.

(iii) For purposes of division (B)(7) of this section, "commercial" shall 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.

(8) A public office or person responsible for public records 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 or prosecution if the subject of the investigation or prosecution were an adult, unless the request to inspect or to obtain a copy of the record is for the purpose of acquiring information that is subject to release as a public record under this section and 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 justiciable claim of the person.

(9)(a) Upon written request made and signed by a journalist, a public office, or person responsible for public records, having custody of the records of the agency employing a specified designated public service worker shall disclose to the journalist the address of the actual personal residence of the designated public service worker and, if the designated public service worker's spouse, former spouse, or child is employed by a public office, the name and address of the employer of the designated public service worker's spouse, former spouse, or child. The request shall include the journalist's name and title and the name and address of the journalist's employer and shall state that disclosure of the information sought would be in the public interest.

(b) Division (B)(9)(a) of this section also applies to journalist requests for:

(i) Customer information maintained by a municipally owned or operated public utility, other than social security numbers and any private financial information such as credit reports, payment methods, credit card numbers, and bank account information;

(ii) Information about minors involved in a school vehicle accident as provided in division (A)(1)(gg) of this section, other than personal information as defined in section [149.45](#) of the Revised Code.

(c) As used in division (B)(9) of this section, "journalist" means a person engaged in, connected with, or employed by any news medium, including a newspaper, magazine, press association, news agency, or wire service, a radio or television station, or a similar medium, for the purpose of gathering, processing, transmitting, compiling, editing, or disseminating information for the general public.

(10) Upon a request made by a victim, victim's attorney, or victim's representative, as that term is used in section [2930.02](#) of the Revised Code, a public office or person responsible for public records shall transmit a copy of a depiction of the victim as described in division (A)(1)(ii) of this section to the victim, victim's attorney, or victim's representative.

(C)(1) If a person allegedly is aggrieved by the failure of a public office or the person responsible for public records to promptly prepare a public record and to make it available to the person for inspection in accordance with division (B) of this section or by any other failure of a public office or the person responsible for public records to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section, the person allegedly aggrieved may do only one of the following, and not both:

(a) File a complaint with the clerk of the court of claims or the clerk of the court of common pleas under section [2743.75](#) of the Revised Code;

(b) Commence a mandamus action to obtain a judgment that orders the public office or the person responsible for the public record to comply with division (B) of this section, that awards court costs and reasonable attorney's fees to the person that instituted the mandamus action, and, if applicable, that includes an order fixing statutory damages under division (C)(2) of this section. The mandamus action may be commenced in the court of common pleas of the county in which division (B) of this section allegedly was not complied with, in the supreme court pursuant to its original jurisdiction under Section 2 of Article IV, Ohio Constitution, or in the court of appeals for the appellate district in which division (B) of this section allegedly was not complied with pursuant to its original jurisdiction under Section 3 of Article IV, Ohio Constitution.

(2) If a requester transmits a written request by hand delivery, electronic submission, or certified mail to inspect or receive copies of any public record in a manner that fairly describes the public record or class of public records to the public office or person responsible for the requested public records, except as otherwise provided in this section, the requester shall be entitled to recover the amount of statutory damages set forth in this division if a court determines that the public office or the person responsible for public records failed to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section.

The amount of statutory damages shall be fixed at one hundred dollars for each business day during which the public office or person responsible for the requested public records failed to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section, beginning with the day on which the requester files a mandamus action to recover statutory damages, up to a maximum of one thousand dollars. The award of

statutory damages shall not be construed as a penalty, but as compensation for injury arising from lost use of the requested information. The existence of this injury shall be conclusively presumed. The award of statutory damages shall be in addition to all other remedies authorized by this section.

The court may reduce an award of statutory damages or not award statutory damages if the court determines both of the following:

(a) That, based on the ordinary application of statutory law and case law as it existed at the time of the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records that allegedly constitutes a failure to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section and that was the basis of the mandamus action, a well-informed public office or person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would believe that the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records did not constitute a failure to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section;

(b) That a well-informed public office or person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would believe that the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records would serve the public policy that underlies the authority that is asserted as permitting that conduct or threatened conduct.

(3) In a mandamus action filed under division (C)(1) of this section, the following apply:

(a)(i) If the court orders the public office or the person responsible for the public record to comply with division (B) of this section, the court shall determine and award to the relator all court costs, which shall be construed as remedial and not punitive.

(ii) If the court makes a determination described in division (C)(3)(b)(iii) of this section, the court shall determine and award to the relator all court costs, which shall be construed as remedial and not punitive.

(b) If the court renders a judgment that orders the public office or the person responsible for the public record to comply with division (B) of this section or if the court determines any of the following, the court may award reasonable attorney's fees to the relator, subject to division (C)(4) of this section:

(i) The public office or the person responsible for the public records failed to respond affirmatively or negatively to the public records request in accordance with the time allowed under division (B) of this section.

(ii) The public office or the person responsible for the public records promised to permit the relator to inspect or receive copies of the public records requested within a specified period of time but failed to fulfill that promise within that specified period of time.

(iii) The public office or the person responsible for the public records acted in bad faith when the office or person voluntarily made the public records available to the relator for the first time after the relator commenced the mandamus action, but before the court issued any order concluding whether or not the public office or person was required to comply with division (B) of this section. No discovery may be conducted on the issue of the alleged bad faith of the public office or person responsible for the public records. This division shall not be construed as creating a presumption that the public office or the person responsible for the public records acted in bad faith when the office or person voluntarily made the public records available to the relator for the first time after the relator commenced the mandamus action, but before the court issued any order described in this division.

(c) The court shall not award attorney's fees to the relator if the court determines both of the following:

(i) That, based on the ordinary application of statutory law and case law as it existed at the time of the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records that allegedly constitutes a failure to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section and that was the basis of the mandamus action, a well-informed public office or person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would believe that the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records did not constitute a failure to comply with an obligation in accordance with division (B) of this section;

(ii) That a well-informed public office or person responsible for the requested public records reasonably would believe that the conduct or threatened conduct of the public office or person responsible for the requested public records would serve the public policy that underlies the authority that is asserted as permitting that conduct or threatened conduct.

(4) All of the following apply to any award of reasonable attorney's fees awarded under division (C)(3)(b) of this section:

(a) The fees shall be construed as remedial and not punitive.

(b) The fees awarded shall not exceed the total of the reasonable attorney's fees incurred before the public record was made available to the relator and the fees described in division (C)(4)(c) of this section.

(c) Reasonable attorney's fees shall include reasonable fees incurred to produce proof of the reasonableness and amount of the fees and to otherwise litigate entitlement to the fees.

(d) The court may reduce the amount of fees awarded if the court determines that, given the factual circumstances involved with the specific public records request, an alternative means should have been pursued to more effectively and efficiently resolve the dispute that was subject to the mandamus action filed under division (C)(1) of this section.

(5) If the court does not issue a writ of mandamus under division (C) of this section and the court determines at that time that the bringing of the mandamus action was frivolous conduct as defined in division (A) of section [2323.51](#) of the Revised Code, the court may award to the public office all court costs, expenses, and reasonable attorney's fees, as determined by the court.

(D) Chapter 1347. of the Revised Code does not limit the provisions of this section.

(E)(1) To ensure that all employees of public offices are appropriately educated about a public office's obligations under division (B) of this section, all elected officials or their appropriate designees shall attend training approved by the attorney general as provided in section [109.43](#) of the Revised Code. A future official may satisfy the requirements of this division by attending the training before taking office, provided that the future official may not send a designee in the future official's place.

(2) All public offices shall adopt a public records policy in compliance with this section for responding to public records requests. In adopting a public records policy under this division, a public office may obtain guidance from the model public records policy developed and provided to the public office by the attorney general under section [109.43](#) of the Revised Code. Except as otherwise provided in this section, the policy may not limit the number of public records that the public office will make available to a single person, may not limit the number of public records that it will make available during a fixed period of time, and may not establish a fixed period of

time before it will respond to a request for inspection or copying of public records, unless that period is less than eight hours.

The public office shall distribute the public records policy adopted by the public office under this division to the employee of the public office who is the records custodian or records manager or otherwise has custody of the records of that office. The public office shall require that employee to acknowledge receipt of the copy of the public records policy. The public office shall create a poster that describes its public records policy and shall post the poster in a conspicuous place in the public office and in all locations where the public office has branch offices. The public office may post its public records policy on the internet web site of the public office if the public office maintains an internet web site. A public office that has established a manual or handbook of its general policies and procedures for all employees of the public office shall include the public records policy of the public office in the manual or handbook.

(F)(1) The bureau of motor vehicles may adopt rules pursuant to Chapter 119. of the Revised Code to reasonably limit the number of bulk commercial special extraction requests made by a person for the same records or for updated records during a calendar year. The rules may include provisions for charges to be made for bulk commercial special extraction requests for the actual cost of the bureau, plus special extraction costs, plus ten per cent. The bureau may charge for expenses for redacting information, the release of which is prohibited by law.

(2) As used in division (F)(1) of this section:

(a) "Actual cost" means the cost of depleted supplies, records storage media costs, actual mailing and alternative delivery costs, or other transmitting costs, and any direct equipment operating and maintenance costs, including actual costs paid to private contractors for copying services.

(b) "Bulk commercial special extraction request" means a request for copies of a record for information in a format other than the format already available, or information that cannot be extracted without examination of all items in a records series, class of records, or database by a person who intends to use or forward the copies for surveys, marketing, solicitation, or resale for commercial purposes. "Bulk commercial special extraction request" does not include a request by a person who gives assurance to the bureau that the person making the request does not intend to use or forward the requested copies for surveys, marketing, solicitation, or resale for commercial purposes.

(c) "Commercial" means profit-seeking production, buying, or selling of any good, service, or other product.

(d) "Special extraction costs" means the cost of the time spent by the lowest paid employee competent to perform the task, the actual amount paid to outside private contractors employed by the bureau, or the actual cost incurred to create computer programs to make the special extraction. "Special extraction costs" include any charges paid to a public agency for computer or records services.

(3) For purposes of divisions (F)(1) and (2) of this section, "surveys, marketing, solicitation, or resale for commercial purposes" shall 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.

(G) A request by a defendant, counsel of a defendant, or any agent of a defendant in a criminal action that public records related to that action be made available under this section shall be considered a demand for discovery pursuant to the Criminal Rules, except to the extent that the Criminal Rules plainly indicate a contrary intent. The defendant, counsel of the defendant, or agent of the defendant making a request under this division shall serve a copy of the request on the prosecuting attorney, director of law, or other chief legal officer responsible for prosecuting the action.

(H)(1) Any portion of a body-worn camera or dashboard camera recording described in divisions (A)(17)(b) to (h) of this section may be released by consent of the subject of the recording or a representative of that person, as specified in those divisions, only if either of the following applies:

(a) The recording will not be used in connection with any probable or pending criminal proceedings;

(b) The recording has been used in connection with a criminal proceeding that was dismissed or for which a judgment has been entered pursuant to Rule 32 of the Rules of Criminal Procedure, and will not be used again in connection with any probable or pending criminal proceedings.

(2) If a public office denies a request to release a restricted portion of a body-worn camera or dashboard camera recording, as defined in division (A)(17) of this section, any person may file a mandamus action pursuant to this section or a complaint with the clerk of the court of claims pursuant to section [2743.75](#) of the Revised Code, requesting the court to order the release of all or portions of the recording. If the court considering the request determines that the filing articulates by clear and convincing evidence that the public interest in the recording substantially outweighs privacy

interests and other interests asserted to deny release, the court shall order the public office to release the recording.

Ohio Revised Code Section 2743.75

(A) In order to provide for an expeditious and economical procedure that attempts to resolve disputes alleging a denial of access to public records in violation of division (B) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code, except for a court that hears a mandamus action pursuant to that section, the court of claims shall be the sole and exclusive authority in this state that adjudicates or resolves complaints based on alleged violations of that section. The clerk of the court of claims shall designate one or more current employees or hire one or more individuals to serve as special masters to hear complaints brought under this section. All special masters shall have been engaged in the practice of law in this state for at least four years and be in good standing with the supreme court at the time of designation or hiring. The clerk may assign administrative and clerical work associated with complaints brought under this section to current employees or may hire such additional employees as may be necessary to perform such work.

(B) The clerk of the court of common pleas in each county shall act as the clerk of the court of claims for purposes of accepting those complaints filed with the clerk under division (D)(1) of this section, accepting filing fees for those complaints, and serving those complaints.

(C)(1) Subject to division (C)(2) of this section, a person allegedly aggrieved by a denial of access to public records in violation of division (B) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code may seek relief under that section or under this section, provided, however, that if the allegedly aggrieved person files a complaint under either section, that person may not seek relief that pertains to the same request for records in a complaint filed under the other section.

(2) If the allegedly aggrieved person files a complaint under this section and the court of claims determines that the complaint constitutes a case of first impression that involves an issue of substantial public interest, the court shall dismiss the complaint without prejudice and direct the allegedly aggrieved person to commence a mandamus action in the court of appeals with appropriate jurisdiction as provided in division (C)(1) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code.

(D)(1) An allegedly aggrieved person who proceeds under this section shall file a complaint, on a form prescribed by the clerk of the court of claims, with the clerk of the

court of claims or with the clerk of the court of common pleas of the county in which the public office from which the records are requested is located. The person shall attach to the complaint copies of the original records request and any written responses or other communications relating to the request from the public office or person responsible for public records and shall pay a filing fee of twenty-five dollars made payable to the clerk of the court with whom the complaint is filed. The clerk shall serve a copy of the complaint on the public office or person responsible for public records for the particular public office in accordance with Civil Rule 4.1 and, if the complaint is filed with the clerk of the court of common pleas, shall forward the complaint to the clerk of the court of claims, and to no other court, within three business days after service is complete.

(2) Upon receipt of a complaint filed under division (D)(1) of this section, the clerk of the court of claims shall assign a case number for the action and a special master to examine the complaint. Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in this section, upon the recommendation of the special master, the court of claims on its own motion may dismiss the complaint at any time. The allegedly aggrieved person may voluntarily dismiss the complaint filed by that person under division (D)(1) of this section.

(E)(1) Upon service of a complaint under division (D)(1) of this section, except as otherwise provided in this division, the special master assigned by the clerk under division (D)(2) of this section immediately shall refer the case to mediation services that the court of claims makes available to persons. If, in the interest of justice considering the circumstances of the case or the parties, the special master determines that the case should not be referred to mediation, the special master shall notify the court that the case was not referred to mediation, and the case shall proceed in accordance with division (F) of this section. If the case is referred to mediation, any further proceedings under division (F) of this section shall be stayed until the conclusion of the mediation. Any mediation proceedings under this division may be conducted by teleconference, telephone, or other electronic means. If an agreement is reached during mediation, the court shall dismiss the complaint. If an agreement is not reached, the special master shall notify the court that the case was not resolved and that the mediation has been terminated.

(2) Within ten business days after the termination of the mediation or the notification to the court that the case was not referred to mediation under division (E)(1) of this section, the public office or person responsible for public records shall file a response, and if applicable, a motion to dismiss the complaint, with the clerk of the court of claims and transmit copies of the pleadings to the allegedly aggrieved party. No further motions or pleadings shall be accepted by the clerk of the court of claims or by the special master assigned by the clerk under division (D)(2) of this section unless the special master directs in writing that a further motion or pleading be filed.

(3) All of the following apply prior to the submission of the special master's report and recommendation to the court of claims under division (F)(1) of this section:

(a) The special master shall not permit any discovery.

(b) The parties may attach supporting affidavits to their respective pleadings.

(c) The special master may require either or both of the parties to submit additional information or documentation supported by affidavits.

(F)(1) Not later than seven business days after receiving the response, or motion to dismiss the complaint, if applicable, of the public office or person responsible for public records, the special master shall submit to the court of claims a report and recommendation based on the ordinary application of statutory law and case law as they existed at the time of the filing of the complaint. For good cause shown, the special master may extend the seven-day period for the submission of the report and recommendation to the court of claims under this division by an additional seven business days.

(2) Upon submission of the special master's report and recommendation to the court of claims under division (F)(1) of this section, the clerk shall send copies of the report and recommendation to each party by certified mail, return receipt requested, not later than three business days after the report and recommendation is filed. Either party may object to the report and recommendation within seven business days after receiving the report and recommendation by filing a written objection with the clerk and sending a copy to the other party by certified mail, return receipt requested. Any objection to the report and recommendation shall be specific and state with particularity all grounds for the objection. If neither party timely objects, the court of claims shall promptly issue a final order adopting the report and recommendation, unless it determines that there is an error of law or other defect evident on the face of the report and recommendation. If either party timely objects, the other party may file with the clerk a response within seven business days after receiving the objection and send a copy of the response to the objecting party by certified mail, return receipt requested. The court, within seven business days after the response to the objection is filed, shall issue a final order that adopts, modifies, or rejects the report and recommendation.

(3) If the court of claims determines that the public office or person responsible for the public records denied the aggrieved person access to the public records in violation of division (B) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code and if no appeal from the court's final order is taken under division (G) of this section, both of the following apply:

(a) The public office or the person responsible for the public records shall permit the aggrieved person to inspect or receive copies of the public records that the court requires to be disclosed in its order.

(b) The aggrieved person shall be entitled to recover from the public office or person responsible for the public records the amount of the filing fee of twenty-five dollars and any other costs associated with the action that are incurred by the aggrieved person, but shall not be entitled to recover attorney's fees, except that division (G)(2) of this section applies if an appeal is taken under division (G)(1) of this section.

(G)(1) Any appeal from a final order of the court of claims under this section or from an order of the court of claims dismissing the complaint as provided in division (D)(2) of this section shall be taken to the court of appeals of the appellate district where the principal place of business of the public office from which the public record is requested is located. However, no appeal may be taken from a final order of the court of claims that adopts the special master's report and recommendation unless a timely objection to that report and recommendation was filed under division (F)(2) of this section. If the court of claims materially modifies the special master's report and recommendation, either party may take an appeal to the court of appeals of the appellate district of the principal place of business where that public office is located but the appeal shall be limited to the issue in the report and recommendation that is materially modified by the court of claims. In order to facilitate the expeditious resolution of disputes over alleged denials of access to public records in violation of division (B) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code, the appeal shall be given such precedence over other pending matters as will ensure that the court will reach a decision promptly.

(2) If a court of appeals in any appeal taken under division (G)(1) of this section by the public office or person responsible for the public records determines that the public office or person denied the aggrieved person access to the public records in violation of division (B) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code and obviously filed the appeal with the intent to either delay compliance with the court of claims' order from which the appeal is taken for no reasonable cause or unduly harass the aggrieved person, the court of appeals may award reasonable attorney's fees to the aggrieved person in accordance with division (C) of section [149.43](#) of the Revised Code. No discovery may be conducted on the issue of the public office or person responsible for the public records filing the appeal with the alleged intent to either delay compliance with the court of claims' order for no reasonable cause or unduly harass the aggrieved person. This division shall not be construed as creating a presumption that the public office or the person responsible for the public records filed the appeal with the intent to either delay compliance with the court of claims' order for no reasonable cause or unduly harass the aggrieved person.

(H) The powers of the court of claims prescribed in section [2743.05](#) of the Revised Code apply to the proceedings in that court under this section.

(I)(1) All filing fees collected by a clerk of the court of common pleas under division (D)(1) of this section shall be paid to the county treasurer for deposit into the county general revenue fund. All such money collected during a month shall be transmitted on or before the twentieth day of the following month by the clerk of the court of common pleas to the county treasurer.

(2) All filing fees collected by the clerk of the court of claims under division (D)(1) of this section shall be deposited into the state treasury to the credit of the public records fund, which is hereby created. Money credited to the fund shall be used by the court of claims to assist in paying for its costs to implement this section. All investment earnings of the fund shall be credited to the fund. Not later than the first day of February of each year, the clerk of the court of claims shall prepare a report accessible to the public that details the fees collected during the preceding calendar year by the clerk of the court of claims and the clerks of the courts of common pleas under this section.

(J) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of the auditor of state under division (G) of section [109.43](#) of the Revised Code.