

Nothing to Hide: A Deep Dive Into Oklahoma's Open Government Laws

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2025 Open Meeting & Open Records Act Regional Seminars
Tulsa | Norman | Stillwater | Oklahoma City



Purpose of the Open Meeting and Records Acts



***Transparency in Government
Government under the Microscope***

JUSTICE LOUIS B. BRANDEIS

*“Sunshine is said to be
the best of disinfectants.”*



The Open Meeting Act (OMA)

*25 O.S. 2021,
§§ 301 – 314*



OVERVIEW

- What is a meeting?
- What is a public body?
- Types of meetings.
- Executive Sessions.
- Agendas.
- Civil and criminal repercussions for violating the Open Meeting Act.



PUBLIC PURPOSE OF OMA

- Encouraging citizens to know more about public bodies, governmental processes, and governmental problems.

Advance notice • Agenda • Minutes

- Meeting in a centralized, accessible location for citizens to come and watch government in action.

Convenient times & places



WHEN THE OMA APPLIES?

When a ¹***majority*** of a ²***public body's*** members come together to ³***conduct public business.***



PUBLIC BODY DEFINED

[25 O.S. 2021, § 304\(1\)](#), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 2.

Municipal governing bodies

Boards of county commissioners

Boards of public and higher education

All boards, bureaus, commissions, agencies, trusteeships, authorities, councils, committees, and public trusts

Any committee or subcommittee of a public body

ELEMENTS OF PUBLIC BODY ANALYSIS

Supported by
public funds

Entrusted with
spending
public funds

Administration
of public
property

Actual or de-facto
decision-making
authority*

**25 O.S. 2021, §§ 304(1) & *Sanders v. Benton*, 1978 OK 53, 579 P.2d 815;
Int'l Firefighters, Local No. 2479 v. Thorpe, 1981 OK 95, 632 P.2d 408.**

EXEMPT PUBLIC ENTITIES

The Judiciary

State Legislature and legislators

Administrative staff of public bodies

Other entities, incl. Racing Stewards, Council on Judicial Complaints

Multi-disciplinary teams provided for under Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes for sole purpose of considering recommendations of team and deciding placement of a child

Board of Directors of federally-qualified health center

* Committees that are purely fact finding, informational, recommendatory, or advisory with no decision-making authority. [*Andrews v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 29 of Cleveland Cnty.*, 1987 OK 40, 737 P.2d 929.](#)

Private organizations that contract to provide goods or services to the public on behalf of a governmental agency and receive payment as reimbursement. 2002 OK AG 37.

DEFINING ‘SUPPORT’

[2020 OK AG 2](#)

- **Question:** Does the OMA and ORA apply to the OSSAA?
- OAG concluded that OSSAA was not subject to the OMA because of two reasons—
 - No evidence that OSSAA was supported by public funds. Defined support as “to pay the costs of; maintain,”
 - Based on this definition, our office has distinguished between—
 - Entity receiving public funds pursuant to legislative enactment or other government authorization for a public purpose, or
 - Entity simply paid in exchange for providing identifiable goods and services
 - OSSAA didn’t fit well on either side of this spectrum. Thus, the Office concluded that it more consistently fit in the latter.



MEETING DEFINED

*Conduct of business of a public body by a majority of its members being personally together or, as authorized by Section 307.1 of this title, together pursuant to a videoconference. **Meeting shall not include informal gatherings of a majority of the members of a public body when no business of the public body is discussed.***

Public body + Majority of public body members + conducting business = meeting that must be open



MAJORITY vs. QUORUM

- OMA default for quorum is a majority.
- A specific act or rule for a particular public body may determine that less than a majority of the public body is authorized to transact business on behalf of the public body. This may be referred to as a quorum. In any event, rely on the specific statute or rule over § 304(2) when determining if a meeting must comply with the OMA. [Unpublished Opinion 93-587](#).
- **Example:** X members shall constitute a quorum of the **[Public body]**.
- Ex-officio members can be included in your count. See [2009 OK AG 26](#).
- Your quorum **DOES NOT** decrease in light of a vacancy. See [1982 OK AG 165](#).



TEXTS, EMAILS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Elaine sends an email to her fellow board members about an upcoming agenda item.

Kramer has an opinion, and he smashes reply all.

Infuriated, George also replies all to ask a question.

Having an observation to share, Jerry decides to chime in and replies all.

A meeting has occurred, and the OMA is violated.



POST-MEETING MEAL OR COFFEE



BEST PRACTICE: A majority of a public body's members should not attend meals together.

Public body comprising of Charlie, Mac, Dennis, Deandra, and Frank has a properly noticed meeting in accordance with the Open Meeting Act.

The meeting adjourns at lunchtime. Charlie, Glenn, and Mac decide to grab lunch afterwards at Guigino's. While there, they decide to debrief.



‘CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS’

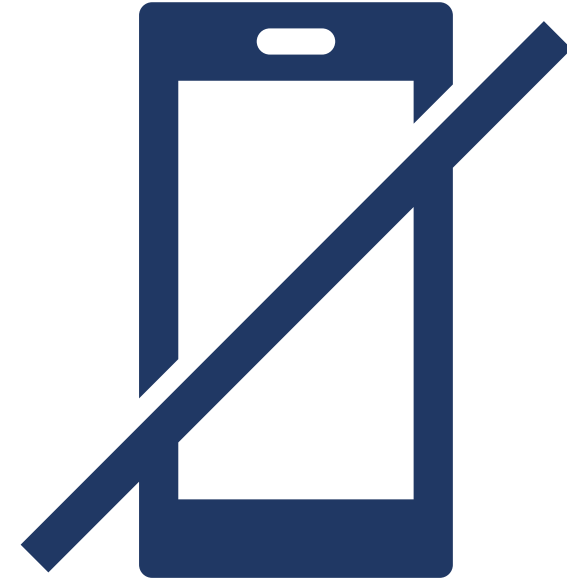
- Construed the ordinary meaning of the phrase in harmony with the Act’s purpose.
- Includes the **entire** decision-making process, including presentation of information, deliberation, decision, or formal action.

In re Appeal of Order Declaring Annexation Dated June 28, 1978, 1981 OK CIV APP 57, 637 P.2d 1270; **1982 OK AG 212.**



CIRCUMVENTING THE ACT

- Public body cannot use informal gatherings or electronic or telephonic communications among a majority of the members to decide any action or vote on any matter.
- Convenient **≠** Legal.



MEETINGS OF LESS THAN A QUORUM

[2020 OK AG 4](#)

- **Question:** May a minority of a public body's members can meet outside of a public meeting consistent with the OMA?
- The short answer is that it depends.
- If the public body is doing so to willfully and purposefully circumvent the Act, a court might say that such a meeting, even among a minority, is a violation.
- **DO NOT—**
 - *Conduct polling, or*
 - *Hold discussions with the desired aim of reaching a consensus prior to a meeting.*
- Allowed to hold informational briefings where information is provided and received.
- **REMEMBER:** The purpose of the OMA is to facilitate public knowledge and awareness of governmental problems and processes.



MEETINGS



CORE REQUIREMENTS



Provide Advance Notice



Post Agenda



ADVANCE NOTICE TO WHOM?

- State public bodies and governing boards of higher education: **Secretary of State.**
- County public bodies, boards of education, and public bodies under the auspices of a governing board of higher education: **County Clerk** of the county in which the body is principally located.
- Municipal public bodies: **Municipal Clerk.**



TIMES AND PLACES OF MEETINGS

- **SPECIFIED** times and places,
- **CONVENIENT** to the public,
- **OPEN** to the public, and
- Must provide advance notice (agenda).



Rogers v. Excise Bd. of Greer Cnty.

[1984 OK 95, 701 P.2d 754](#)

- Excise Bd. scheduled meeting to be held a legal holiday.
- The meeting was held in a ***locked*** courthouse.
- Court held that this was a willful violation of the OMA. It demonstrated a blatant or deliberate disregard by those who know or should know, if not a willful and purposeful violation of the OMA.



TIMES AND PLACES

- Can you have your meeting on Black Friday?
Probably not.
- Can you have your meeting between Christmas Day and New Year's Eve?
Legally, yes. Practically, not a good idea.



TYPES OF MEETINGS



REGULARLY
SCHEDULED
MEETINGS



SPECIAL
MEETINGS



EMERGENCY
MEETINGS



CONTINUED OR
RECONVENED
MEETINGS



REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS



- Advance Notice
 - All meetings for the upcoming calendar year must be sent to the appropriate record-keeping clerk by December 15 of the current year.
 - Time, date, and place.
- Posting the Agenda
 - 24 hours prior to the time of the meeting in *prominent public view* at location of meeting or the principal office of public body, **AND**
 - May also upload to public body's website.*
 - Excludes Saturdays, Sundays, and public (legal) holidays.
- New business allowed to the extent that it meets the following:
If it is known about or could have reasonably been foreseen prior to the time of posting the notice and agenda for the meeting, then it is not new business. See 25 O.S. 2021, § 311(A)(10).

25 O.S. 2021, §§ 304(3) & 311(A)(1, 8-10), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 4 & 14-17.



REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS (cont'd)

- Changing the date, time, or place?
Notice must be given to the appropriate recordkeeping clerk no less than ten (10) days prior to the implementation of any such change.
- What does this mean?
A public body cannot change the time, date, or place of a regularly scheduled meeting if the meeting is set less than ten (10) days away.

A public body **may move up** a regularly scheduled meeting, but the meeting cannot be scheduled less than ten (10) days from the date that notice of the change is published.

BEST PRACTICE: Set a special meeting if the issue(s) is/are urgent and cancel the regularly scheduled meeting.



SPECIAL MEETINGS



- Advance Notice
 - 48 hours prior to time of meeting.
 - Time, date, and place.
 - Must also send notice to those who have requested to receive notice of meeting.
- Posting the Agenda
 - 24 hours prior to the time of the meeting in *prominent public view* at location of meeting or the principal office of public body, or
 - Public Body **may elect** the agendas for special meetings to its website.
 - Excludes Saturdays, Sundays, and public (legal) holidays.
- New business **NOT** permitted.

25 O.S. 2021, § 303(4) & 311(A)(12), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 4 & 17–18.



REGULAR v. SPECIAL MEETINGS

	Regular Meeting	Special Meeting
Advance notice	Notice to Secretary of State of time, date, and location all regular meetings for next CY no later than December 15 of current year.	48 hours advance notice to Secretary of State of time, date, and location. Also, notify persons requesting notice of special meetings
Agenda posting	24 hours prior to meeting (excl. weekends and holidays).	24 hours prior to meeting (excl. weekends and holidays).
Posting location	Website <i>AND</i> office or meeting location for STATE public bodies	Website <i>AND</i> office or meeting location for STATE public bodies
New business	Allowed*	Not allowed

25 O.S. 2021, §§ 304(3) & 311(A)(1) & (8)–(10).

25 O.S. 2021, § 304(4) & 311(A)(12).

CONTINUED OR RECONVENED MEETINGS



- Give notice of such action that the original meeting, including—
 - Date,
 - Time, and
 - Place of continued meeting.
- Only matters appearing on the agenda for the meeting continued may be discussed on continuance or reconvening meeting.
- **BEST practice**: Post notice on website and with recordkeeping clerk. Also, post updated agenda with remaining items of business.



EMERGENCY MEETINGS



- Must first meet the definition of ‘emergency’, which is a “situation involving injury to persons or injury and damage to public or personal property or immediate financial loss ***when the time requirements for public notice of a special meeting would make such procedure impractical and increase the likelihood of injury or damage or immediate financial loss.***”
- Advance Notice
 - As much advance notice as is reasonable and possible under the circumstances existing, and
 - In person, telephonic, or electronic.
- Posting the Agenda
 - As much advance notice as is reasonable and possible under the circumstances existing.
- Must include nature of emergency and reasons for declaring such emergency meeting in written minutes for an emergency meeting.

25 O.S. §§ 304(5) and 311(A)(13), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 18.



MINUTES & RECORDING

- Must be written and taken by a designated person.
- Minutes are an **official summary** of the proceedings—
 - Must show who is present and absent, matters considered, and actions taken ([2012 OK AG 24](#));
 - Shall be open for inspection, and
 - Shall reflect the manner and time of notice required under the OMA.
- Minutes must be taken in executive session. [Berry v. Bd. of Governors of Registered Dentists, 1980 OK 45, 611 P.2d 628.](#)
- State law does not require minutes to be approved.
- Recording the proceedings
 - Members of the public can record the meeting; however, they are not entitled to interfere with the conduct of the public meeting.



PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Public bodies are not required to allow an opportunity for the public to comment on matters or issues being considered by the public body, but it may allow for such comments.
- Public bodies may limit public comment to items set forth on the agenda, or it may allow for open comment.
- If a public body decides to include public comment in its meetings, the public body should consider adopting a policy, such as setting a time limit for each person providing public comments, setting a cut-off for when persons must sign up to participate in the public comments, and potentially limiting the comments to agenda items.
- An agenda item titled “Visitors Comments” or “Public Comments” is sufficient to meet the requirements under the OMA.
- **CAUTION:** Items for discussion on the agenda should not be discussed by the public body at this time. This is the public body’s opportunity to listen.

2002 OK AG 26 & 1998 OK AG 45, Yellow Book (26th ed.) 49, 51–52.



TAKING ACTION

- Votes of each member of a public body: must be publicly cast **and** recorded.
- May only take action on agenda items that indicate or provide for action to be taken.
- If the vote is either not publicly cast or not recorded, the action taken is invalid. [**Oldham v. Drummond Bd. of Educ.**, 1975 OK 147, 542 P.2d 1309.](#)



VIDEOCONFERENCE & TELECONFERENCE

1. Not less than a quorum must be present at site of meeting.
2. All public body members must be audible and visible to one another.
3. Executive sessions are **NOT** allowed.
4. Notice and agenda must include the **locations** of the meeting; the videoconference sites (*i.e.*, location, address, and telephone number); and identity of members and from where they will appear.
5. Members of public bodies may only participate from the district or subdivision from which they are elected, appointed, or sworn to represent.
6. Materials shared must be immediately available “in the same form and manner” as shared with the public body.
7. Public must be allowed to participate and speak as allowed by rule or policy set by the public body at the videoconference site as permitted at the site of the meeting.
8. Each site and room must be open and accessible to the public.



EXECUTIVE SESSIONS



TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Can I do it?

Does it meet one of the bases, or is there some other legal authority?

2. How do I do it legally?

a. Have I posted it on the agenda?

b. Have I cited to the specific basis for executive session?

c. Have I provided context as to what the public body will be discussing?

d. Has a majority of the public body present voted to enter executive session?



BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

- A “**majority**” of the public body members present must vote in the affirmative to enter into executive session. 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(E)(2).
- Executive sessions are not authorized when a public body meets via videoconference. 25 O.S. 2021, § 307.1.
- Public vote to enter executive session.
- Cannot vote or poll in executive session.
- Public vote to exit out of executive session.

BEST PRACTICE: After exiting executive session, announce the following, “No votes were taken in executive session, and no items not listed on the agenda for discussion in executive session were discussed.”



EIGHT MOST COMMON BASES

Allowed ***only under certain circumstances and only those circumstances allowed under statute***, such as —

- Discussing employment, hiring, appointment, promotion, demotion, disciplining, resignation, or termination [§ 307(B)(1)];
- Discuss negotiations concerning employees and representatives of employee groups [§ 307(B)(2)];
- Discuss sale, purchase, lease, acquisition, or appraisal of real property [§ 307(B)(3)];
- Confidential communications between public body and attorney, the disclosure of which would impair the public body's ability to proceed in the public interest [§ 307(B)(4)];



EIGHT MOST COMMON BASES (cont'd)

- To hear evidence and discuss expulsion or suspension of a student when requested by the student involved or student's parent, attorney or legal guardian [§ 307(B)(5)];
- Discuss matters involving a specific handicapped child [§ 307(B)(6)];
- Discussing matter in which information is subject to confidentiality requirements under state or federal law [§ 307(B)(7)]; or
- Deliberations in an individual proceeding pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act [§ 307(B)(8)].



CONSTRUING SECTION 307

- Cannot talk about a job opening in executive session.
[2006 OK AG 17.](#)
- Cannot discuss hiring independent contractors.
[2005 OK AG 29.](#)
- Must identify the unique position or person if holding executive session under §307(B)(1). [1997 OK AG 61.](#)
- “Pending” under § 307(B)(4) includes an *anticipated or potential* claim, litigation, investigation, or action.
[2005 OK AG 29.](#)
So what? — You’re safe to rely on a litigation evidence hold or demand letter.



REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS

Only certain people allowed in executive session when the sale, purchase, lease, acquisition, or appraisal of real estate property is discussed. These people are—

- Public body members,
- Attorney for the public body, and
- Immediate staff of the public body.

Cannot invite landowners, real estate salesperson, broker, developer, or any other person who may profit directly or indirectly from proposed transaction being considered.

Exception—these individuals are operating pursuant to an agreement to represent the public body.



SAMPLE AGENDA LANGUAGE # 1

[§ 307(B)(1)]

Discussion and possible action to convene in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(1), to discuss the **[hiring, termination, performance, or employment]** of **[Name of employee/Unique position]**.

- a. Vote to enter Executive Session.
- b. EXECUTIVE SESSION pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(1).
- c. Vote to exit Executive Session.
- d. Possible action regarding item(s) discussed in Executive Session.



SAMPLE AGENDA LANGUAGE # 2

[§ 307(B)(1)]

Discussion and possible action to convene in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(1), to conduct interviews of **[Candidate A, Candidate B, Candidate C, etc.]** for the position of **[Unique position]**, and to discuss the hiring or appointment, including setting annual compensation, of any of the above-mentioned candidates,

- a. Vote to enter Executive Session.
- b. EXECUTIVE SESSION pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(1).
- c. Vote to exit Executive Session.
- d. Possible action regarding item(s) discussed in Executive Session.



SAMPLE AGENDA LANGUAGE # 3

[§ 307(B)(4)]

Discussion and possible action to convene in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(4), to discuss the **[case (incl. case number), litigation, claim, investigation]**.

- a. Vote to enter Executive Session.
- b. EXECUTIVE SESSION 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(4).
- c. Vote to exit Executive Session.
- d. Possible action regarding item(s) discussed in Executive Session.

Opinion of counsel: On the advice of counsel, disclosure of communications related to the above-referenced **[case, litigation, claim, investigation]** will seriously impair the ability of [Name of public body] to process **[case, litigation, claim, investigation]** in the public interest.



SAMPLE AGENDA LANGUAGE # 4

[§ 307(B)(7)]

Discussion and possible action to convene in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(7), to discuss **[matter]** where disclosure of information would violate confidentiality requirements of state or federal law, specifically **[Citation to state or federal law]**.

- a. Vote to enter Executive Session.
- b. EXECUTIVE SESSION 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(7).
- c. Vote to exit Executive Session.



SAMPLE AGENDA LANGUAGE # 5

[§ 307(B)(8)]

Discussion and possible action to convene in Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(8), to engage in deliberations or engage in intermediate decision in an individual proceeding pursuant to Article II of the Administrative Procedures Act concerning **[Case, Case No.]**.

- a. Vote to enter Executive Session.
- b. EXECUTIVE SESSION 25 O.S. 2021, § 307(B)(8).
- c. Vote to exit Executive Session.
- d. Possible action regarding item(s) discussed in Executive Session.



AGENDAS



WORDING THE AGENDA

- “Shall identify all items of business to be transacted by a public body at a meeting.”
- Must include any proposed executive session
- If executive session is proposed, public body must:
 - Contain sufficient information for public to know what the public body is going to discuss.
 - Identify items of business and purposes of executive session, and
 - State which provision under § 307 applies.



WORDING THE AGENDA (cont'd)

- Must be worded in plain language, directly stating the purpose of the meeting.
- Language used should be—
 - Simple,
 - Direct, and
 - Comprehensible to a person of ordinary education and intelligence.

Andrews v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 29 of Cleveland Cnty., 1987 OK 40, 737 P.2d 929; **Haworth Bd. of Educ. Of Indep. Sch. Dist. No. I-6, McCurtain Cnty. v. Havens**, 1981 OK CIV APP 56, 637 P.2d 902.



AGENDA EXAMPLE #1

Wilson v. City of Tecumseh, [2008 OK CIV APP 84, 194 P.3d 140.](#)

- Public body provides sufficient notice to the recordkeeping clerk.
- Then, public body publishes the following agenda item for a proposed executive session:
- Proposed Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. §307(B)(1) to discuss the employment, hiring, and resignation of [Employee].
- Public body enters into executive session, discusses the above matter, votes to exit executive session, and then votes to award a bonus (equivalent of 6 months in salary) to the Employee.
- What's wrong here?



AGENDA EXAMPLE #2

Haworth Bd. of Educ. of Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 1-6, McCurtain Cnty. v. Havens,
[1981 OK CIV APP 56, 637 P.2d 902.](#)

- Public body provides sufficient notice to the recordkeeping clerk.
- Then, public body publishes an agenda with the following language:
- Proposed Executive Session pursuant to 25 O.S. §307(B)(1) to discuss appointment of board member. Discussion of hiring administrator. Hiring principal. A second notice and agenda listed the items to be considered as:
 - Appoint new board member.
 - Interview a new administrator.
 - Hire principals.
- Public body enters into executive session, discusses the matters listed above, exits executive session, and then votes to hire and set a salary for a superintendent.
- What's wrong here?



F.O.P., Bratcher/Miner Mem'l Lodge, Lodge No. 122 v. City of Norman

[2021 OK 20, 489 P.3d 20.](#)

- Norman City Council took action on their operating budget on June 16, 2020.
- Agenda states that the Council can (1) adopt or (2) reject the budget.
- Agenda refers to FYE 2021 Budget Amendments 6-12-2020.
- City Council took up and adopted three amendments, reallocating funds away from Norman PD. The amendments were not attached as a part of the amendments attached to the agenda.
- Fraternal Order of Police sued, alleging a violation.



F.O.P., Bratcher/Miner Mem'l Lodge, Lodge No. 122 v. City of Norman (cont'd)

- The trial court found against the City of Norman, concluding that the City had violated the OMA and granted summary judgment.
- City of Norman appealed to the Supreme Court.
- The Oklahoma Supreme Court retained the appeal.
- The OSC affirmed the District Court, finding that the City of Norman violated the OMA.
- Agenda was written to only allow adoption or rejection of the budget, not amendment.
- OSC held the agenda to be deceptively vague and likely to mislead, thus making it a willful violation of the OMA.



BEST PRACTICES AFTER *F.O.P. v. NORMAN*

- Do not limit the agenda to just adoption or rejection; it is best to include “possible action.” On the agenda, you might consider listing what “possible action” means.
- Indicate or cite your supporting documents or attachments on the actual agenda.
- If sufficient time allows, list all amendments one by one under the item of business. If done this way, you may want to include language allowing members of the public body to make amendments during the meeting. State law or municipal charter or ordinance may require otherwise.
- **Remember:** the expression one thing excludes others.



POSSIBLE ACTION

“Possible action” includes, but is not limited to, approval, authorization, adoption, rejection, denial, amendment, taking no action, or tabling the item for disposition at a later date or time.



Hirschfeld v. Oklahoma Turnpike Auth.

[2023 OK 59](#)

- In December 2021, Turnpike Authority Executive Director announced that OTA was seeking to develop the “most robust long-range plan in its history.”
- In January 2022, the Authority held votes on the approval or disapproval of a resolution authorizing a line of credit to provide interim financing of “***certain turnpike projects***” and to “authoriz[e] the Director to submit an application to the Council on Bond Oversight for provisional and final approval of the interim financing of certain turnpike projects.” **No turnpikes or projects were identified.**
- At this same meeting, the Authority also voted on a program management contract for engineering.



Hirschfeld v. Oklahoma Turnpike Auth. (cont'd)

- In February 2022, the Authority voted to approve or disapprove professional design contracts “for [the] **ACCESS Bond Program.**” The Authority also voted on a right-of-way management contract for “various turnpikes.” Finally at the February meeting, the Authority voted on utility management contract(s) for ACCESS Bond Program and Capital Program on “**various turnpikes.**” **No turnpikes or projects were identified.**
- Finally, during the director’s report at the February 2022 meeting, Gov. Stitt announces the ACCESS Program. OTA launches the ACCESS Program website with **proposed** routes. **This is the first time that the public is informed what ACCESS Oklahoma is.** Information about the projects was also the lead story in major media publications and with Oklahoma broadcast news.



Hirschfeld v. Oklahoma Turnpike Auth. (cont'd)

- Landowners & residents affected by the South Extension filed suit in Cleveland County.
- District Judge Timothy Olsen ruled that OTA violated the OMA willfully and granted summary judgment to the landowners and residents.
- On appeal, judgment was reversed and remanded with instructions to grant summary judgment in favor of OTA.



Hirschfeld v. Oklahoma Turnpike Auth. (cont'd)

- Sufficient notice was given in the agenda items for the action proposed. Issuance of the bonds and proposed route were not up for possible action until June 2022.
- Because no action was taken with regard to ACCESS Oklahoma, the OMA did not require more notice about the announcement.
- Court went a step further and found that because it had exclusive jurisdiction to review and validate the bonds, it also had sole authority to review the OMA claims.



Best practices following *Hirschfeld*

- **NEVER** use phrases like “certain turnpike projects.” They’re vague and possibly deceptively so.
- **ALWAYS** address any “major” public announcements on an agenda separately and use language that is sufficiently informative rather than under “Director’s Report.”
- **ALWAYS** label non-finalized plans or proposed projects as a “DRAFT” or “PROPOSED.”



LEGISLATORS AND EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

Members of the Legislature as a member of a legislative committee “shall be permitted” to “attend”:

- (1) **any** executive session
- (2) authorized by the Open Meeting Act
- (3) of **any state** agency, board, or commission
- (4) Whenever the committee has *jurisdiction over the public body’s actions*



LEGALITY OF SECTION 310

[2024 OK 12](#)

- Section 310 is constitutional. It acts as check to executive power.
- Committee jurisdiction requirement does not concern the substance of any one specific executive session or the public body's actions related to that particular matter. Instead, the focus is on whether the committee has general oversight over the state public body.
- Withdrew 1978 OK AG 144.
- Legislators should be presumed to act in good faith when asserting their right to attend executive session.
- To the extent attorney-client privilege exists, a public body can undertake necessary actions to prevent the legislator from disclosing such communications.
- Public body may exclude legislator if the legislator is suing or has publicly entertained the idea of suing the public body.

25 O.S. 2021, § 310, Yellow Book (26th ed.) 14.



WHY SHOULD I COMPLY?



VIOLATIONS OF THE ACT

CIVIL REMEDY

- Actions taken in willful violation are ***invalid***.
- Minutes of executive session will be made public when OMA is violated.
- ***Any person*** can bring civil action. Successful party is entitled to reasonable attorney fees.

CRIMINAL PENALTIES

- Any willful violation, if convicted, is a **misdemeanor**, and is punishable by:
 - Fine up to \$500,
 - One (1) year in the county jail, or
 - Both.

Remember *F.O.P. v. City of Norman*?

- Following its decision in April 2021, the Oklahoma Supreme Court granted FOP's motion for appeal-related attorney fees.
- In a July 2021 journal entry order, the City of Norman and FOP agreed to just less than \$40,000.00 in attorney fees subject to a post-judgment interest rate of 5.25%.
- Total paid: **\$44,307.07**.

Source:

<https://www.oscn.net/dockets/GetCaseInformation.aspx?db=Appellate&number=119296> &
<https://www.oscn.net/dockets/GetCaseInformation.aspx?ct=Cleveland&number=CJ-2020-661> (last visited Sept. 24, 2024).



STATE OF OKLAHOMA V. GOUCHER

CF-2022-48 (Custer County)

- Former county official indicted by the Multicounty Grand Jury with willful violation of the Open Meeting Act.
- Official pled guilty to charges on September 25, 2023, in exchange for a three-year deferred sentence but also serving 45 days in county jail and restitution in the amount of \$10,000.00. Defendant was not entitled to any extra credit.
- The court also conditioned the defendant's sentence by prohibiting him being employed by "a government entity."

Source:

<https://www.oscn.net/dockets/GetCaseInformation.aspx?db=custer&number=CF-2022-00048&cmid=8563836> (last visited Sept. 24, 2024).



WILLFULNESS

“Willfulness does not require a showing of bad faith, malice, or wantonness, but rather, encompasses *conscious, purposeful violations of law¹ or blatant or deliberate disregard of the law²* by those who know, or should know . . . Notice of meetings of public bodies which are **deceptively vague¹** or *likely to **mislead²*** constitute a willful violation.”

[Rogers v. Excise Bd. of Greer Cnty.](#),
[1984 OK 95, 701 P.2d 754.](#)



Yellow Book (26th ed.) 45.



“CORRECTING” AN INVALID ACTION

- ❑ Post advance notice,
- ❑ Post agenda timely with accurately worded agenda item, and
- ❑ Take item up, re-vote, and record the decision.



OVERVIEW

- Public policy and purpose of the ORA.
- What is a record?
- What is public body and official?
- Confidentiality of records.
- Production of records and fees.
- Penalties for violating the Open Records Act.



PUBLIC POLICY OF THE ACT

Oklahoma citizens have an “inherent right to know and be fully informed about their government.”



PURPOSE OF THE ACT

“[T]o ensure and facilitate the public’s right of access to and review of government records so they may efficiently and intelligently exercise their inherent political power.”

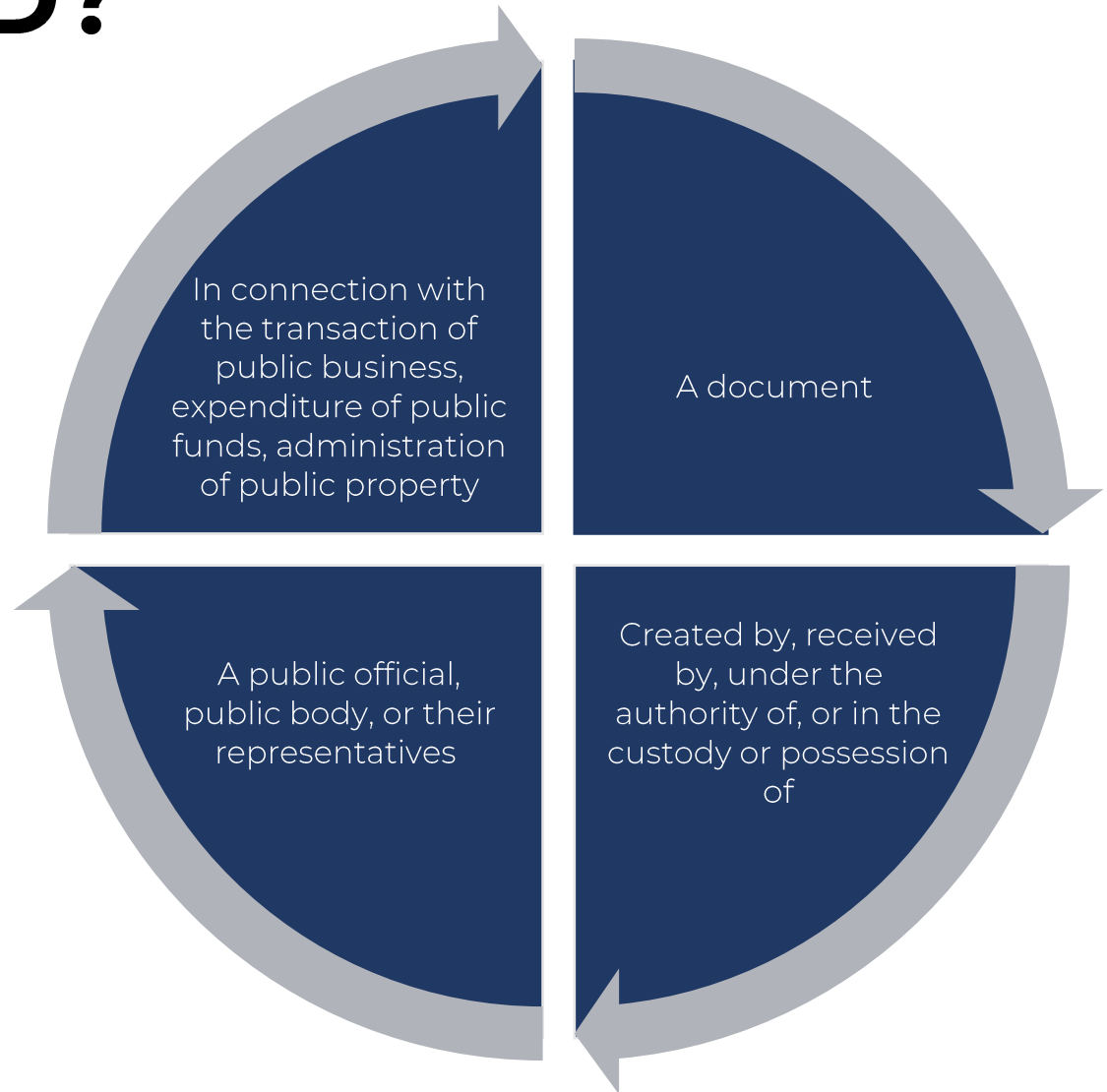


RECORDS



WHAT IS A RECORD?

- The Act defines a “record” broadly; it must only meet these four features.
- **REMEMBER:** “including, but not limited to”



51 O.S. 2021, § 24A.2,
Yellow Book (26th ed.) 70.

WHAT IS A DOCUMENT?

- Books
- Papers
- Photographs
- Microfilm
- Certain data files
- Computer tape
- Disks
- Records
- Sound or Film Recordings
- Video recordings
- Emails
- Text messages.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Most electronic communications will not be subject to any privilege or confidentiality and are, broadly speaking, producible.



It doesn't matter where an electronic communication is on a private or public device if it is a producible public record.

It's a balancing act between efficiency and protecting governmental records from unwanted disclosure.



PUBLIC BODIES AND OFFICIALS

Public bodies: any office, department, board, bureau, commission, agency, trusteeship, authority, council, committee, trust, municipality, or school district, etc.

Public body does not include, judges, justices, Council on Judicial Complaints, the Legislature, or legislators.

Public official:
Official or employee
of public body



LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

- Must be charged with enforcing state or local criminal laws AND initiating criminal prosecutions
- **ADDED by Senate Bill 535, 2025 Okla. Sess. Laws ch. 404:** state or local fire marshal when investigating potential violations of federal, state, or local criminal laws on behalf of another law enforcement agency.
- Statutorily designated law enforcement agencies—
 - Police departments,
 - DPS,
 - OBNDDC,
 - ABLE Commission, and
 - OSBI.



WHAT IS A **NOT** A RECORD?

Computer Software

Nongovernmental personal effects



When a record meets these broad definitions, it is open.

A record may, nonetheless, be shielded from disclosure if a specific exemption or exception applies.



EXEMPTIONS & EXCEPTIONS



EXEMPTIONS TO THE OPEN RECORDS ACT

51 O.S.Supp.2024, § 24A.5(1)(a)–(o), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 73–75.

Attorney-client privilege, work product, identify of informer	Executive Sessions authorized under the Open Meetings Act	Personal driver's license information	Board of Medicolegal Investigation Information
Testing materials for state licensure exams	Other state & federal statutes, <i>i.e.</i> FERPA, Juvenile Records	PII of an individual claiming a lottery prize	Personal financial information, credit reports, or other financial data
GPS records re: electronic toll collection systems and A/V recordings of certain activities	DD-Form 214 filed with a county clerk, including any form filed before July 1, 2002	OTRD State Park Guest PII	Certain DPS records
Information to obtain licensure from a state licensing body	Investigation records obtained by OSDH concerning long-term care administration	Documents and other records obtained by OAG and OID regarding pharmacy choice investigations	Records specifically required to be kept confidential by law

STATE EVIDENTIARY PRIVILEGE: ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

The Attorney-Client Privilege generally protects communications made in confidence between privileged persons for the purpose of seeking, obtaining, or providing legal assistance for the client. 12 O.S.2021, §2502(A)(5).

*Note: The attorney-client privilege for public officers or government agencies is more limited than a private client. Government clients only enjoy the privilege when the communication concerns a pending investigation, claim, or action, when disclosure will seriously impair the ability of the public officer or agency to process the claim or conduct a pending investigation, litigation, or proceeding in the public interest. [12 O.S.2021, § 2502\(D\)\(7\)](#).



STATE EVIDENTIARY PRIVILEGE: IDENTITY OF INFORMANT

- To be an informant, the person must furnish information relating to or assisting in an investigation of a possible violation of law to a law enforcement officer.
- Claimable by the public entity to which information is furnished.
- Exception: previous disclosure; material witness; co-defendant; providing testimony relevant to a materials issue.



JUVENILE RECORDS

The following are confidential, subject to certain exceptions:

- Juvenile court records
- Agency records
- DA records
- Law enforcement records
- Nondirectory education records
- Social records



EXCEPTIONS

The Act applies, but these records may be kept from disclosure under the ORA. Here are some records that may be kept confidential–

Certain personnel
records

Certain law
enforcement
records

Personal notes

Voluntarily supplied
information to
public body

Litigation files &
investigatory reports

Federal records

Personal
communications
related to exercise of
constitutional rights

Educational records

Information related
to terrorism

PERSONNEL RECORDS

Subject to the sole discretion of the public body, it may keep personnel records confidential in two situations:

1. Internal personnel investigations, except final disciplinary action resulting in some action, *i.e.* termination, loss of pay.
2. Cases when disclosure would warrant an invasion of personal privacy.



PERSONNEL RECORDS (cont'd)

- Public bodies should utilize a balancing test weighing the public's right to know against the employee's right to privacy.
- Protected from disclosure: home addresses, home telephone numbers, Social Security numbers, private email addresses, and private mobile phone numbers of current and former public employees shall not be open to public inspection or disclosure; provided, however, that nothing in this subsection shall be construed to exempt from disclosure public records created using a private email address or private mobile phone.
- Except as may otherwise be confidential by statute, public employees have a right to access their own personnel file.



LAW ENFORCEMENT RECORDS

- **General rule under ORA:** records are open.
- **Law enforcement agency rule:** records are confidential, except for those identified in the ORA, if kept.
- Cannot deny access to record previously produced.
- Must be maintained as specified by law.
- If there is no legal requirement to keep the records, records can be retained to the extent necessary for administrative purposes.



LAW ENFORCEMENT RECORDS

Arrestee descriptions or mug shots

Arrest facts, including officer & cause

Chronological list of incidents

Incident reports

Crime summaries

Radio logs, including calls dispatched

Conviction information

Disposition of all warrants

Jail registries, including booking info

Audio/video recordings from body/vehicle devices

LEO RECORDS: REDACTING BEFORE RELEASE

Audio or video recordings may be redacted before release to obscure any specific portions that:

Depict death of a person or body.*

Depict nudity

Identify minors under 16 y/o.

Depict acts of severe violence resulting in great bodily injury wherein person is “clearly visible.”*

Depict great bodily injury.*

Include personal medical information not public.

Undermine assertion of privilege under mental health laws.

Identify alleged victims of sex crimes or domestic violence.

* Except when effected by law enforcement officer

51 O.S.2021, § 24A.8(A)(10)(b), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 85–89.



LEO RECORDS: REDACTING BEFORE RELEASE

(cont'd)

Identifies any person providing information to law enforcement or the information provided by that person when person requests anonymity or disclosure of informant or information would be expected to threaten or endanger the physical safety and welfare of informant, informant's property or others or their property.

Undermine assertion of identity of informer privilege.

Includes PII other than name or license plate no official arrested, cited, charged, or issued a written warning.

Includes information that would materially compromise an ongoing criminal investigation.†

Reveals identity of law enforcement officers subject of internal investigation as a result from the event depicted in recording.



RECORDINGS IN ONGOING CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

- Must release unredacted recordings **ten (10) days** after arraignment or initial appearance, whichever occurs first.
- Provides avenue for prosecutor or legal representative charged to grant extension of time for which recording may be kept confidential.
- Prosecutor must show that a material compromise ongoing investigation; or
- Legal representative may argue that release would compromise the right of an accused to a fair trial.
- Court must hold hearing on the request for extension and may only grant up to six (6) month extensions for a cumulative period of no more than eighteen (18) months.
- Avenue for appeal within one hundred and twenty (120) days from recording's creation if no criminal charges brought.

51 O.S.2021, § 24A.8(A)(10)(b)(12)(a–b), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 86–88.



ONGOING DUTY TO PRODUCE RECORDINGS

- NOTHING in section 24A.8(1) permits a law enforcement agency from denying records due to a lacking the capability to redact or obscure audio or visual records or (2) relieves the law enforcement agency from producing such records.
- Law enforcement agency must still provide prompt, reasonable access to the records.
- **REMEMBER:** The Open Records Act does not say shall; it says ***may***. However, there may still cases in which the “may” is actually a shall (e.g., records of juveniles, non-public privileged health information, mental health/substance abuse health information, and PII).



LAW ENFORCEMENT RECORDS

- **Pleadings** in a criminal case may be kept confidential, until filed with the court clerk (unless sealed or otherwise protected). See, e.g., [22 O.S. § 385](#).
- **Traffic collision reports** may be withheld for up to 60 days, but the reports shall be made available as soon as practicable upon request to certain individuals (parties involved in the collision and their legal counsel, law enforcement agency, newspaper, radio, television broadcaster, etc.). [47 O.S. § 40-102](#); [Cummings, 1993 OK 36, 849 P.2d 1087](#).
- **Dash/Body-mounted camera footage** is an OPEN RECORD but may be subject to redaction pursuant to § 24A.8(A)(9)–(10). See [Ward & Lee, P.L.C. v. City of Claremore, 2014 OK CIV APP 1, 316 P.3d 225](#).



CONFIDENTIAL LITIGATION FILES AND INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS

Litigation files and investigatory reports may be kept confidential by–

- Attorney General of the State of Oklahoma,
- Agency attorneys authorized by law,
- Workers' Compensation Commission,
- Office of district attorney of any county, and
- Office of municipal attorney for any municipality



HIDE-AND-SEEK: OPEN RECORDS

If a record is open under the Act, a public body cannot place it in an investigative or litigation file and make it confidential.



CONFIDENTIAL PERSONAL NOTES

A public official may keep confidential his or her personal notes and personally created materials **prior to taking action**.

- Prior to making a recommendation
- Prior to issuing a report.

Any research leading to adoption of public policy or implementation of public project does not fall under this exemption.

REMEMBER: Consider disposition schedule; duty to maintain records for a period of time.



VOLUNTARILY SUPPLIED INFORMATION

Any information, records or other material heretofore voluntarily supplied to any **state** agency, board or commission shall be subject to full disclosure.

*Exception: if disclosure would give an unfair advantage to competitors or bidders in certain situations delineated in Section 24A.10(B).



UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

A public body or official may keep the following records confidential to the extent they may result in unfair advantage to a vendor's or bidder's competitors:

- Bid specifications for competitive bidding prior to publication of the RFP;
- Contents of sealed bids prior to them being opened;
- Computer programs or software but not data thereon;
- Appraisals relating to sale or acquisition of real estate by a public body prior to award of a contract; and
- Prospective location of a private business or industry prior to public disclosure of such prospect except for records otherwise open to inspection such as applications for permits or licenses.



TRADE SECRETS, BUSINESS PLANS, etc.

Specific public bodies can keep confidential:

- Business plans, feasibility studies, financing proposals, marketing plans, financial statements, or trade secrets submitted by a person or entity seeking economic advise, business development or customized training
- Proprietary information
- Information compiled in response

Cannot keep information confidential if person or entity consents to disclosure



‘TRADE SECRET’ DEFINED

Information, including a formula, pattern, compilation, program, device, method, technique, or process, that:

- Derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use, and
- Subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy.
- Trade secrets are privileged. [12 O.S. § 2508.](#)



CONFIDENTIAL FEDERAL RECORDS

To the extent federal law requires a public body to keep a record confidential, the following may be kept confidential:

- Records coming into possession of public body from federal government, or
- Records generated or gathered by a public body as required by federal law.



PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS RELATING TO EXERCISE OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

- Public body can keep confidential the contents of any communication received by a person exercising their First Amendment right or under article II of the Oklahoma Constitution.
- Public official's written response may be kept confidential to the extent necessary to protect identity of person exercising his or her rights.



EDUCATIONAL RECORDS

Public educational institutions may keep confidential the following–

- Individual student records,
- Teacher lesson plans, tests and other teaching material, and
- Personal communications concerning individual students.
- If the public educational institution accepts federal funding, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) will apply.
- Statistical information that is not identifiable to a particular student and directory information shall be open for public inspection and copying, if kept.
- Student (18 years or older) or parent may request institution to request prior consent before release of directory information.
- Name/Image/Likeness contracts with student athletes



TERRORISM AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Investigative Evidence of plan or scheme to commit terrorism

Vulnerability assessments of governmental facilities or public improvements and work papers related to preparing the vulnerability assessment

Details about deterring or preventing or protecting from an act or threat of terrorism

Details about responding or remediating after an act of terrorism

Investigative evidence of an act of terrorism already committed



TERRORISM AND IT

Design and functional
schematics
demonstrating
relationships or
connections between
devices or systems

System configuration
information

Security monitoring and
response equipment
placement and
configuration

Specific location or
placement of systems,
components, or devices

System identification
numbers, names, or
connecting circuits

Business continuity or
disaster planning or
response plans

Investigative
information directly
related to security
penetrations or denials
of service



TERRORISM DEFINED

- The ORA applies the title 21 definition.
- **Title 21, section 1268.1** defines terrorism as:
 - One or more kidnappings, or other act of violence;
 - Series of acts of violence, resulting in damage to property, person injury or death;
 - Threat of such act or acts that appears to be intended to:
 - Intimidate or coerce a civilian population,
 - Influence governmental policy or conduct by intimidation or coercion, or
 - Retaliate against governmental policy or conduct by intimidation or coercion.



A FEW MORE EXCEPTIONS TO NOTE

A Protective Order withholding material from the public must include: (1) statement from the court, (2) specific identification of material to be withheld, and (3) a Confidential stamp or label. [51 O.S.2021, § 24A.29.](#)

Court records are open, unless the court seals the record or a portion of it. To seal the record, the court must find a “compelling privacy interest exists which outweighs the public’s interest in the record.” The order sealing the record must be public and must make specific findings of fact and conclusions of law. [51 O.S.2021, § 24A.30.](#)

CLEET and the Department of Public Safety shall keep certain law enforcement training records confidential. 51 O.S.2021, § 24A.8.



PRODUCTION PROCEDURES





Open to **any** person



Inspection, copying, or
mechanical reproduction



Prompt, reasonable access



Redaction



Available for release during regular
business hours*



Subject to permissible fees

SIX PILLARS OF PRODUCTION

51 O.S.2021, § 24A.5, Yellow Book (26th ed.) 73, 76–80.



A REQUEST OF THE REQUESTOR

- Need to have reasonable basis for information requested.
- The relevant AG opinion has concluded that–
 - Public body can require that the request be put in writing, and
 - Sufficient information for the public body to determine whether the request is for a commercial purpose or whether charges can be imposed.
- The opinion also greenlighted requiring a name and information necessary to contact the requestor about his or her request.
- Cannot make a requester sign a contract.



RECORD REQUEST FORM

- **PERMISSIVE.**
- Public bodies may require a requestor to complete and submit a form created or developed by the public body.
- Example fields:
 - Time Frame
 - Ask for specified records
 - Search terms
 - Type of requestor
 - Purpose of request



Open to **any** person



RECORD REQUESTS

- Public body responsibilities:
 - Ask for clarification if the request is not reasonably specific.
 - Must engage with requestor to seek information needed to fulfill the request and identify records sought.
- *Reasonable specificity* means—
 - General time frame within which the records were created or transmitted,
 - Identifiable records rather than asking for general information without any qualifiers or other specifications, and
 - Search terms “sufficiently specific to assist public body in identifying requested records.”
- Public body may still deny record if request is still not reasonably specific after attempted engagement.



CHARGING FEES



Subject to permissible fees

- Public body may charge fee only for recovery of the **reasonable, direct costs** of–
 - Copying, or
 - Mechanical reproduction (printing).
- Fees cannot exceed the following caps–
 - \$0.25 for records printed on 8.5” x 14” or smaller, or
 - \$1.00 for certified copies of records.
- Public body may charge an advance payment of estimated fees. Senate Bill 535, 2025 Okla. Sess. Laws ch. 404.
- Fees must be posted at the principal office **AND** be on file with the county clerk for the county in which public body is located.
- Search fee allowed for: commercial purpose or excessive disruption.
- Reasonable fee to cover direct cost of record search and copying (time).
- **Fees “shall not be used for purpose of discouraging requests for information or obstacles to disclosure.”**



COMMERCIAL PURPOSE

- *Merrill v. OTC*, 1992 OK 53, ¶ 12, 831 P.2d 634, 642:
Appellant intended to use them in his profession and act as a “private attorney general.”
- *County Records, Inc. v. Armstrong*, 2012 OK 60, 299 P.3d 865 (followed by *Texas File, LLC v. Boevers*, 2019 OK CIV APP 20, 437 P.3d 211).
While the case focused on land records, the Supreme Court evaluated the purpose of the Appellant’s request for records: to sell them for profit.
- Code of Federal Regulations (1 C.F.R. § 602.3)
“[U]se or purpose that furthers the commercial, trade, or profit interests of the [r]equester.”
- Other Jurisdictions (Arizona, Kentucky, and Illinois)
 - 1) Direct or indirect use of a public record or records,
 - 2) From public record or information derived from any part of record,
 - 3) Any form,
 - 4) Sale, resale, lease, subscription, resale, solicitation, or advertisement for sales or services.



EXEMPTION FROM FEES

- Search fees cannot be imposed on news media.
- Search fee also cannot be imposed when release of record is in the public interest including, but not limited to, release to news media, scholars, authors and taxpayers to determine those entrusted with affairs of government are honestly, faithfully, and competently performing job duties.



Subject to permissible fees



TIMELINE FOR RESPONSES

PROMPT, REASONABLE ACCESS

What does it mean?

The answer will always be contextual.



Inspection, copying, or
mechanical reproduction



Prompt, reasonable access

51 O.S.2021, § 24A.5(6), Yellow Book (26th ed.) 78–79.



PROMPT, REASONABLE ACCESS

Up to several
business days

> 30 business days



20 potentially responsive
records over a 30-day period

10,000 potentially responsive
records over a 2-year period



Prompt, reasonable access

51 O.S.2021, § 24A.5, Yellow Book (26th ed.) 78.



PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS

Public body is permitted to establish “reasonable procedures” to –

- Protect integrity and organization of records, and
- Prevent excessive disruptions of its essential functions.

Delay in providing access must have nexus solely to time required for preparation of request documents and avoidance of excessive disruptions to public body’s essential functions.



PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS (cont'd)

- A public body cannot unreasonably delay completion of prior requests that will take substantially longer than a more current request. No more “first in, first out.”
- A public body that uploads any records online meets its obligation of providing prompt, reasonable access.



PRODUCTION OF RECORDS: PUBLIC BODIES OPEN LESS THAN 30 HOURS A WEEK



Available for release during
regular business hours*

Public body must post and maintain notice at its principal office and the county clerk where public body is located the following:

- Designate days of week when records are available for inspection, copying, or mechanical reproduction,
- Set forth name, mailing address, and telephone number of employee in charge of records; and
- Describe in detail procedures for obtaining records at least two (2) days of the week, excluding Sunday.

Requestor and public body may agree to a time and date for inspection, copying, or mechanical reproduction outside of the designated time and days described in the written notice.



NO ADDITIONAL RECORDKEEPING REQUIREMENTS

- The ORA does not impose additional recordkeeping requirements on public bodies or public officials.
- If a record does not exist, a public body or public official **DOES NOT** have a duty to create one to fulfill an ORA request.
- If a public body or public official does create a record, the newly created record must be maintained for subsequent inspection, copying, or mechanical reproduction.



REDACTION

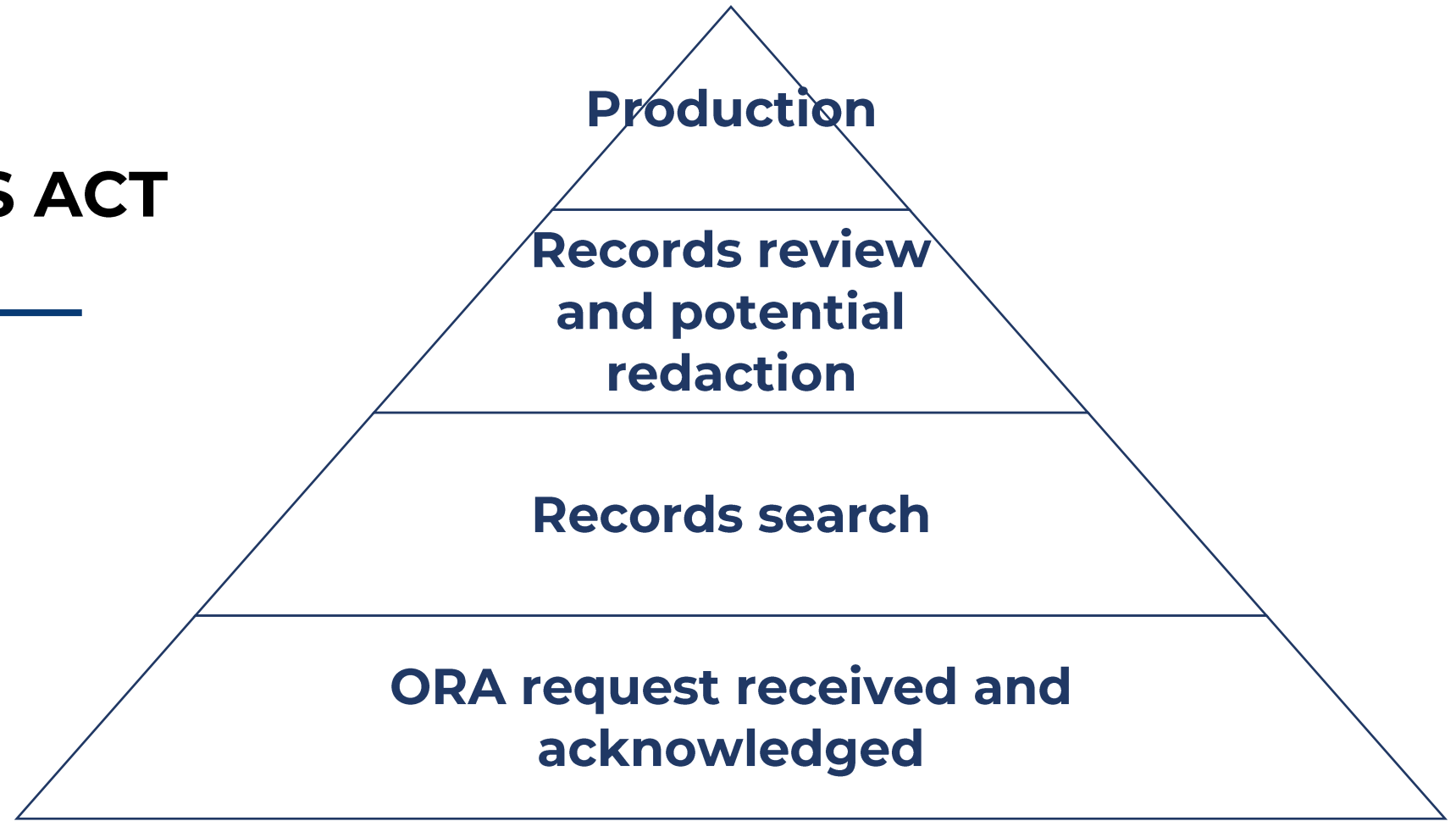
Sometimes the entire record will be exempt, but if redaction is possible, the reasonably segregable portion(s) of a record containing exempt material shall be provided after the exempt portion has been removed.



Redaction



OPEN RECORDS ACT PROCESS



Wagner v. Office of the Sheriff of Custer Cnty.

[2021 OK CIV APP 20, 492 P.3d 1240](#)

- Out-of-state requestor asked for records from Custer County Sheriff and for the records to be emailed to him.
- Sheriff refused, stating that he would oblige the requestor with right to inspect, copy, or print the records. Requestor insisted on receiving the records by electronic mail.
- Requestor filed suit seeking relief under §24A.17(B).
- The District Court granted Sheriff's motion for summary judgment. On appeal, the Court of Civil Appeals affirmed the District Court. The court held that the ORA only provides for inspection, copying, or mechanical reproduction. Accordingly, Sheriff did not possess any obligation to email the records to the requestor.



Ross v. City of Owasso (Ross I)

[2017 OK CIV APP 4, 389 P.3d 396](#)

- City of Owasso allowed former city manager to resign following investigation into misconduct. The city hired outside counsel to conduct the investigation, which resulted in the creation of an investigative report. The report detailed criminal violations and violations of city policy.
- City manager received generous severance package following approval of settlement with Owasso City Counsel. A former councilmember (Ross) objected based on clause in the city manager's contract that stated he forfeited the severance if he was fired for cause.
- Severance Agreement contained a confidentiality clause as well as a non-disparagement clause.
- COCA ruled that parties cannot, by agreement, keep records confidential and that cannot argue that the record is "not in its possession."



Brooke v. Reed

2025 OK 86, ___ P.3d ___

- Plaintiff submitted an ORA request to OSDH on March 23, 2020, for public records correspondence between the Governor's Office, OSDH, and the State Epidemiologist.
- He asked for digital copies.
- Brooke filed suit on April 8, 2020, asking for declaratory and injunctive relief in accordance with Section 24A.17.
- The trial court initially denied OSDH's first motion to dismiss.
- Plaintiff clarified at a hearing on his petition for injunctive relief that he actually sought the native files.



***Brooke v. Reed* (cont'd)**

2025 OK 86, ___ P.3d ___

- Eventually, the trial court granted OSDH's motion for summary judgment, finding that the ORA does not require production of native files.
- The Oklahoma Supreme Court affirmed.
- Paragraph 15: "We find that the ordinary, everyday meaning of "data files" does not include embedded metadata. The term 'data files' is broad, but it does not mean data about data." (emphasis in original).
- Paragraph 22: "We hold that the ORA does not require a public body to provide copies of email records in their native file format."



Lawson v. LeFlore Cnty. Det. Ctr. Pub. Tr. Sec. Comm'n

[2025 OK 87, ___ P.3d ___](#)

- Plaintiff bail bondsman submitted an ORA request for records related to the bonding and release of two inmates following a verbal altercation between his wife and a jailer.
- The Jail Trust informed Plaintiff that its records were not subject to the Open Records Act specifically in accordance with section 24A.8.
- Jail Trust asserted that the audio and video footage was not subject to mandatory disclosure.
- It also stated that text messages, emails, and other communications did not exist.
- Also argued that its policies and procedures were not an open record.
- Jail also does not maintain a list of employees working at the time.



Lawson (cont'd)

2025 OK 87, ___ P.3d ___

- Plaintiff sued, specifically arguing that the Jail Trust was not a law enforcement agency as defined by the Open Records Act.
- Both Plaintiff and Jail Trust filed motions for summary judgment.
- The trial court granted the Jail Trust's motion and denied Plaintiff's.
- The Supreme Court retained the appeal on its own motion.
- **Held:** Jail Trust is not a law enforcement agency under the Open Records Act. It does not enforce state or local criminal laws or initiate criminal prosecutions.



VIOLATIONS OF THE ACT

CIVIL REMEDY

- **Requester** denied records can bring petition for declaratory or injunctive relief.
- Petition limited to what records denied; cannot amend petition.
- If successful, requester entitled to reasonable attorney fees.
- If public body succeeds and demonstrates that suit was “clearly frivolous,” public body entitled to reasonable attorney fees.
- Requester must give 10 business day notice to public body and AG before filing petition.

CRIMINAL PENALTIES

- If convicted, public official is guilty of a **misdemeanor**, and is punishable by:
 - Fine up to \$500,
 - One (1) year in the county jail, or
 - Both.

PUBLIC ACCESS COUNSELOR

- Three bases for review—
 - Requesting review of public body's commercial purpose determination,
 - Denial of records (must be 30 days after denial), or
 - Failure to provide prompt, reasonable access
 - 7 business days - 7 business days - 60 calendar days
- Advisory Opinions
 - Issuance of an advisory opinion is subject to the AG's discretion
 - Public body may ask for an advisory opinion on a question related to a record.
 - Can be requested by the public body, the public body's administrative head, or its attorney
- Future requests may be denied if a person files multiple frivolous requests.



PUBLIC ACCESS COUNSELOR

IMMUNITY

- If a public body or officials disclose records consistent with an OAG-PAC advisement, a public body or public officials are immune from the Act's penalties and all liabilities as a result of the disclosure.
- If a public body or officials rely in good faith on an advisory opinion, the public body is not liable for penalties under the Act so long as the facts on which the advice was given were fully and fairly disclosed to the OAG-PAC.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- OAG cannot further disclose records a public body or official deems confidential or privileged.
- OAG-PAC work papers, records you provide, correspondence between public body or officials and OAG-PAC regarding advice under section 24A.40.





THE END

If you have a question regarding the applicability of or compliance with these Acts, please consult your respective district attorney, city attorney, or board or agency counsel.

