

ASSEMBLY, No. 3340

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman JON M. BRAMNICK

District 21 (Morris, Somerset and Union)

SYNOPSIS

Exempts certain volunteer fire companies and volunteer fire departments from open public records act.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **AN ACT** concerning exemptions from disclosure law for certain
2 public bodies and amending P.L.1995, c.23.

3

4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6

7 1. Section 1 of P.L.1995, c.23 (C.47:1A-1.1) is amended to
8 read as follows:

9 1. As used in P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended
10 and supplemented:

11 "Biotechnology" means any technique that uses living
12 organisms, or parts of living organisms, to make or modify
13 products, to improve plants or animals, or to develop micro-
14 organisms for specific uses; including the industrial use of
15 recombinant DNA, cell fusion, and novel bioprocessing techniques.

16 "Custodian of a government record" or "custodian" means in the
17 case of a municipality, the municipal clerk and in the case of any
18 other public agency, the officer officially designated by formal
19 action of that agency's director or governing body, as the case may
20 be.

21 "Government record" or "record" means any paper, written or
22 printed book, document, drawing, map, plan, photograph,
23 microfilm, data processed or image processed document,
24 information stored or maintained electronically or by sound-
25 recording or in a similar device, or any copy thereof, that has been
26 made, maintained or kept on file in the course of his or its official
27 business by any officer, commission, agency or authority of the
28 State or of any political subdivision thereof, including subordinate
29 boards thereof, or that has been received in the course of his or its
30 official business by any such officer, commission, agency, or
31 authority of the State or of any political subdivision thereof,
32 including subordinate boards thereof. The terms shall not include
33 inter-agency or intra-agency advisory, consultative, or deliberative
34 material.

35 A government record shall not include the following information
36 which is deemed to be confidential for the purposes of P.L.1963,
37 c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented:

38 information received by a member of the Legislature from a
39 constituent or information held by a member of the Legislature
40 concerning a constituent, including but not limited to information in
41 written form or contained in any e-mail or computer data base, or in
42 any telephone record whatsoever, unless it is information the
43 constituent is required by law to transmit;

44 any memorandum, correspondence, notes, report or other
45 communication prepared by, or for, the specific use of a member of

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

1 the Legislature in the course of the member's official duties, except
2 that this provision shall not apply to an otherwise publicly-
3 accessible report which is required by law to be submitted to the
4 Legislature or its members;

5 any copy, reproduction or facsimile of any photograph, negative
6 or print, including instant photographs and videotapes of the body,
7 or any portion of the body, of a deceased person, taken by or for the
8 medical examiner at the scene of death or in the course of a post
9 mortem examination or autopsy made by or caused to be made by
10 the medical examiner except:

11 when used in a criminal action or proceeding in this State which
12 relates to the death of that person,

13 for the use as a court of this State permits, by order after good
14 cause has been shown and after written notification of the request
15 for the court order has been served at least five days before the
16 order is made upon the county prosecutor for the county in which
17 the post mortem examination or autopsy occurred,

18 for use in the field of forensic pathology or for use in medical or
19 scientific education or research, or

20 for use by any law enforcement agency in this State or any other
21 state or federal law enforcement agency;

22 criminal investigatory records;

23 victims' records, except that a victim of a crime shall have access
24 to the victim's own records;

25 any written request by a crime victim for a record to which the
26 victim is entitled to access as provided in this section, including,
27 but not limited to, any law enforcement agency report, domestic
28 violence offense report, and temporary or permanent restraining
29 order;

30 personal firearms records, except for use by any person
31 authorized by law to have access to these records or for use by any
32 government agency, including any court or law enforcement
33 agency, for purposes of the administration of justice;

34 personal identifying information received by the Division of Fish
35 and Wildlife in the Department of Environmental Protection in
36 connection with the issuance of any license authorizing hunting
37 with a firearm. For the purposes of this paragraph, personal
38 identifying information shall include, but not be limited to, identity,
39 name, address, social security number, telephone number, fax
40 number, driver's license number, email address, or social media
41 address of any applicant or licensee;

42 trade secrets and proprietary commercial or financial information
43 obtained from any source. For the purposes of this paragraph, trade
44 secrets shall include data processing software obtained by a public
45 body under a licensing agreement which prohibits its disclosure;

46 any record within the attorney-client privilege. This paragraph
47 shall not be construed as exempting from access attorney or
48 consultant bills or invoices except that such bills or invoices may be

1 redacted to remove any information protected by the attorney-client
2 privilege;
3 administrative or technical information regarding computer
4 hardware, software and networks which, if disclosed, would
5 jeopardize computer security;
6 emergency or security information or procedures for any
7 buildings or facility which, if disclosed, would jeopardize security
8 of the building or facility or persons therein;
9 security measures and surveillance techniques which, if
10 disclosed, would create a risk to the safety of persons, property,
11 electronic data or software;
12 information which, if disclosed, would give an advantage to
13 competitors or bidders;
14 information generated by or on behalf of public employers or
15 public employees in connection with any sexual harassment
16 complaint filed with a public employer or with any grievance filed
17 by or against an individual or in connection with collective
18 negotiations, including documents and statements of strategy or
19 negotiating position;
20 information which is a communication between a public agency
21 and its insurance carrier, administrative service organization or risk
22 management office;
23 information which is to be kept confidential pursuant to court
24 order;
25 any copy of form DD-214, NGB-22, or that form, issued by the
26 United States Government, or any other certificate of honorable
27 discharge, or copy thereof, from active service or the reserves of a
28 branch of the Armed Forces of the United States, or from service in
29 the organized militia of the State, that has been filed by an
30 individual with a public agency, except that a veteran or the
31 veteran's spouse or surviving spouse shall have access to the
32 veteran's own records;
33 any copy of an oath of allegiance, oath of office or any
34 affirmation taken upon assuming the duties of any public office, or
35 that oath or affirmation, taken by a current or former officer or
36 employee in any public office or position in this State or in any
37 county or municipality of this State, including members of the
38 Legislative Branch, Executive Branch, Judicial Branch, and all law
39 enforcement entities, except that the full name, title, and oath date
40 of that person contained therein shall not be deemed confidential;
41 that portion of any document which discloses the social security
42 number, credit card number, unlisted telephone number or driver
43 license number of any person; except for use by any government
44 agency, including any court or law enforcement agency, in carrying
45 out its functions, or any private person or entity acting on behalf
46 thereof, or any private person or entity seeking to enforce payment
47 of court-ordered child support; except with respect to the disclosure
48 of driver information by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle

1 Commission as permitted by section 2 of P.L.1997, c.188 (C.39:2-
2 3.4); and except that a social security number contained in a record
3 required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file by a public
4 agency shall be disclosed when access to the document or
5 disclosure of that information is not otherwise prohibited by State
6 or federal law, regulation or order or by State statute, resolution of
7 either or both houses of the Legislature, Executive Order of the
8 Governor, rule of court or regulation promulgated under the
9 authority of any statute or executive order of the Governor;

10 a list of persons identifying themselves as being in need of
11 special assistance in the event of an emergency maintained by a
12 municipality for public safety purposes pursuant to section 1 of
13 P.L.2017, c.266 (C.40:48-2.67); and

14 a list of persons identifying themselves as being in need of
15 special assistance in the event of an emergency maintained by a
16 county for public safety purposes pursuant to section 6 of P.L.2011,
17 c.178 (C.App.A:9-43.13).

18 A government record shall not include, with regard to any public
19 institution of higher education, the following information which is
20 deemed to be privileged and confidential:

21 pedagogical, scholarly and/or academic research records and/or
22 the specific details of any research project conducted under the
23 auspices of a public higher education institution in New Jersey,
24 including, but not limited to research, development information,
25 testing procedures, or information regarding test participants,
26 related to the development or testing of any pharmaceutical or
27 pharmaceutical delivery system, except that a custodian may not
28 deny inspection of a government record or part thereof that gives
29 the name, title, expenditures, source and amounts of funding and
30 date when the final project summary of any research will be
31 available;

32 test questions, scoring keys and other examination data
33 pertaining to the administration of an examination for employment
34 or academic examination;

35 records of pursuit of charitable contributions or records
36 containing the identity of a donor of a gift if the donor requires non-
37 disclosure of the donor's identity as a condition of making the gift
38 provided that the donor has not received any benefits of or from the
39 institution of higher education in connection with such gift other
40 than a request for memorialization or dedication;

41 valuable or rare collections of books and/or documents obtained
42 by gift, grant, bequest or devise conditioned upon limited public
43 access;

44 information contained on individual admission applications; and
45 information concerning student records or grievance or
46 disciplinary proceedings against a student to the extent disclosure
47 would reveal the identity of the student.

1 "Personal firearms record" means any information contained in a
2 background investigation conducted by the chief of police, the
3 county prosecutor, or the Superintendent of State Police, of any
4 applicant for a permit to purchase a handgun, firearms identification
5 card license, or firearms registration; any application for a permit to
6 purchase a handgun, firearms identification card license, or firearms
7 registration; any document reflecting the issuance or denial of a
8 permit to purchase a handgun, firearms identification card license,
9 or firearms registration; and any permit to purchase a handgun,
10 firearms identification card license, or any firearms license,
11 certification, certificate, form of register, or registration statement.
12 For the purposes of this paragraph, information contained in a
13 background investigation shall include, but not be limited to,
14 identity, name, address, social security number, phone number, fax
15 number, driver's license number, email address, social media
16 address of any applicant, licensee, registrant or permit holder.

17 "Public agency" or "agency" means any of the principal
18 departments in the Executive Branch of State Government, and any
19 division, board, bureau, office, commission or other instrumentality
20 within or created by such department; the Legislature of the State
21 and any office, board, bureau or commission within or created by
22 the Legislative Branch; and any independent State authority,
23 commission, instrumentality or agency. The terms also mean any
24 political subdivision of the State or combination of political
25 subdivisions, and any division, board, bureau, office, commission or
26 other instrumentality within or created by a political subdivision of
27 the State or combination of political subdivisions, and any
28 independent authority, commission, instrumentality or agency
29 created by a political subdivision or combination of political
30 subdivisions. The term shall not mean a volunteer fire company or
31 a volunteer fire department established pursuant to N.J.S.40A:14-
32 68, or N.J.S.40A:14-70.1, that is organized under paragraph (3) of
33 subsection (c) of section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code (26
34 U.S.C. s.501).

35 "Law enforcement agency" means a public agency, or part
36 thereof, determined by the Attorney General to have law
37 enforcement responsibilities.

38 "Constituent" means any State resident or other person
39 communicating with a member of the Legislature.

40 "Member of the Legislature" means any person elected or
41 selected to serve in the New Jersey Senate or General Assembly.

42 "Criminal investigatory record" means a record which is not
43 required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file that is held
44 by a law enforcement agency which pertains to any criminal
45 investigation or related civil enforcement proceeding.

46 "Victim's record" means an individually-identifiable file or
47 document held by a victims' rights agency which pertains directly to

1 a victim of a crime except that a victim of a crime shall have access
2 to the victim's own records.

3 "Victim of a crime" means a person who has suffered personal or
4 psychological injury or death or incurs loss of or injury to personal
5 or real property as a result of a crime, or if such a person is
6 deceased or incapacitated, a member of that person's immediate
7 family.

8 "Victims' rights agency" means a public agency, or part thereof,
9 the primary responsibility of which is providing services, including
10 but not limited to food, shelter, or clothing, medical, psychiatric,
11 psychological or legal services or referrals, information and referral
12 services, counseling and support services, or financial services to
13 victims of crimes, including victims of sexual assault, domestic
14 violence, violent crime, child endangerment, child abuse or child
15 neglect, and the Victims of Crime Compensation Board, established
16 pursuant to P.L.1971, c.317 (C.52:4B-1 et seq.) and continued as
17 the Victims of Crime Compensation Office pursuant to P.L.2007,
18 c.95 (C.52:4B-3.2 et al.) and Reorganization Plan No. 001-2008.
19 (cf: P.L.2019, c.255, s.4)

20

21 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

22

23

24 STATEMENT

25

26 This bill exempts volunteer fire companies and volunteer fire
27 departments that are organized as 501(c)(3) organizations from the
28 requirements of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), more
29 commonly known as the open public records act.

30 The open public records act provides for public access to
31 government records. While the open public records act promotes the
32 Legislature's broad policy in favor of granting access to
33 government records, there are nevertheless exceptions when
34 circumstances warrant exclusion from the requirements of that law.
35 This bill recognizes that such circumstances exist in the case of
36 brave residents of this State offering their talent and sometimes
37 their lives to protect the safety and welfare of their neighbors on a
38 voluntary basis. Though the bill exempts volunteer fire companies
39 and volunteer fire departments from the open public records act, it
40 would not exempt all documents related to those groups, such as,
41 for example, when fire districts themselves are required to maintain
42 the basic documents related to the internal organization and
43 functioning of fire squads in those districts as a part of its oversight
44 of the squads.