SENATE, No. 1348

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

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Sponsored by:
Senator SHIRLEY K. TURNER
District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

SYNOPSIS

Requires government records to be made available on Internet and permits custodian to advise requester of record to obtain record directly from Internet.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT concerning public access to government records on the Internet and amending P.L.2001, c.404 and supplementing P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.).

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

1. Section 6 of P.L.2001, c.404 (C.47:1A-5) is amended to read as follows:

6. a. The custodian of a government record shall permit the record to be inspected, examined, and copied by any person during regular business hours; or in the case of a municipality having a population of 5,000 or fewer according to the most recent federal decennial census, a board of education having a total district enrollment of 500 or fewer, or a public authority having less than $10 million in assets, during not less than six regular business hours over not less than three business days per week or the entity's regularly-scheduled business hours, whichever is less; unless a government record is exempt from public access by: P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented; any other statute; resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature; regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or Executive Order of the Governor; Executive Order of the Governor; Rules of Court; any federal law; federal regulation; or federal order. Prior to allowing access to any government record, the custodian thereof shall redact from that record any information which discloses the social security number, credit card number, unlisted telephone number, or driver license number of any person; except for use by any government agency, including any court or law enforcement agency, in carrying out its functions, or any private person or entity acting on behalf thereof, or any private person or entity seeking to enforce payment of court-ordered child support; except with respect to the disclosure of driver information by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission as permitted by section 2 of P.L.1997, c.188 (C.39:2-3.4); and except that a social security number contained in a record required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file by a public agency shall be disclosed when access to the document or disclosure of that information is not otherwise prohibited by State or federal law, regulation or order or by State statute, resolution of either or both houses of the Legislature, Executive Order of the Governor, rule of court or regulation promulgated under the authority of any statute or executive order of the Governor. Except where an agency can demonstrate an emergent need, a regulation that limits access to government records shall not be retroactive in effect or applied to

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 <u>thus</u> is new matter.

deny a request for access to a government record that is pending before the agency, the council or a court at the time of the adoption of the regulation.

b. (1) A copy or copies of a government record may be purchased by any person upon payment of the fee prescribed by law or regulation. Except as otherwise provided by law or regulation and except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the fee assessed for the duplication of a government record embodied in the form of printed matter shall be $0.05 per letter size page or smaller, and $0.07 per legal size page or larger. If a public agency can demonstrate that its actual costs for duplication of a government record exceed the foregoing rates, the public agency shall be permitted to charge the actual cost of duplicating the record. The actual cost of duplicating the record, upon which all copy fees are based, shall be the cost of materials and supplies used to make a copy of the record, but shall not include the cost of labor or other overhead expenses associated with making the copy except as provided for in subsection c. of this section. Access to electronic records and non-printed materials shall be provided free of charge, but the public agency may charge for the actual costs of any needed supplies such as computer discs.

(2) No fee shall be charged to a victim of a crime for a copy or copies of a record to which the crime victim is entitled to access, as provided in section 1 of P.L.1995, c.23 (C.47:1A-1.1).

(3) If the government record is readily available on the public agency website, the custodian shall advise the requester to that effect and provide the requester with the specific uniform resource locator, or equally useful and direct means of locating the material, for each page of the Internet website on which the requested information appears. If the requester does not have access to a computer or the requester would like the custodian to fulfill the request, the request shall be processed and fulfilled pursuant to the provisions of P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.).

c. Whenever the nature, format, manner of collation, or volume of a government record embodied in the form of printed matter to be inspected, examined, or copied pursuant to this section is such that the record cannot be reproduced by ordinary document copying equipment in ordinary business size or involves an extraordinary expenditure of time and effort to accommodate the request, the public agency may charge, in addition to the actual cost of duplicating the record, a special service charge that shall be reasonable and shall be based upon the actual direct cost of providing the copy or copies; provided, however, that in the case of a municipality, rates for the duplication of particular records when the actual cost of copying exceeds the foregoing rates shall be established in advance by ordinance. The requestor shall have the opportunity to review and object to the charge prior to it being incurred.

d. A custodian shall permit access to a government record and provide a copy thereof in the medium requested if the public agency maintains the record in that medium. If the public agency does not maintain the record in the medium requested, the custodian shall either convert the record to the medium requested or provide a copy in some other meaningful medium. If a request is for a record: (1) in a medium not routinely used by the agency; (2) not routinely developed or maintained by an agency; or (3) requiring a substantial amount of manipulation or programming of information technology, the agency may charge, in addition to the actual cost of duplication, a special charge that shall be reasonable and shall be based on the cost for any extensive use of information technology, or for the labor cost of personnel providing the service, that is actually incurred by the agency or attributable to the agency for the programming, clerical, and supervisory assistance required, or both.

e. Immediate access ordinarily shall be granted to budgets, bills, vouchers, contracts, including collective negotiations agreements and individual employment contracts, and public employee salary and overtime information.

f. The custodian of a public agency shall adopt a form for the use of any person who requests access to a government record held or controlled by the public agency. The form shall provide space for the name, address, and phone number of the requestor and a brief description of the government record sought. The form shall include space for the custodian to indicate which record will be made available, when the record will be available, and the fees to be charged. The form shall also include the following: (1) specific directions and procedures for requesting a record; (2) a statement as to whether prepayment of fees or a deposit is required; (3) the time period within which the public agency is required by P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, to make the record available; (4) a statement of the requestor's right to challenge a decision by the public agency to deny access and the procedure for filing an appeal; (5) space for the custodian to list reasons if a request is denied in whole or in part; (6) space for the requestor to sign and date the form; (7) space for the custodian to sign and date the form if the request is fulfilled or denied. The custodian may require a deposit against costs for reproducing documents sought through an anonymous request whenever the custodian anticipates that the information thus requested will cost in excess of $5 to reproduce.

g. A request for access to a government record shall be in writing and hand-delivered, mailed, transmitted electronically, or otherwise conveyed to the appropriate custodian. A custodian shall promptly comply with a request to inspect, examine, copy, or provide a copy of a government record. If the custodian is unable to comply with a request for access, the custodian shall indicate the specific basis therefor on the request form and promptly return it to

the requestor. The custodian shall sign and date the form and provide the requestor with a copy thereof. If the custodian of a government record asserts that part of a particular record is exempt from public access pursuant to P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.) as amended and supplemented, the custodian shall delete or excise from a copy of the record that portion which the custodian asserts is exempt from access and shall promptly permit access to the remainder of the record. If the government record requested is temporarily unavailable because it is in use or in storage, the custodian shall so advise the requestor and shall make arrangements to promptly make available a copy of the record. If a request for access to a government record would substantially disrupt agency operations, the custodian may deny access to the record after attempting to reach a reasonable solution with the requestor that accommodates the interests of the requestor and the agency.

h. Any officer or employee of a public agency who receives a request for access to a government record shall forward the request to the custodian of the record or direct the requestor to the custodian of the record.

i. Unless a shorter time period is otherwise provided by statute, regulation, or executive order, a custodian of a government record shall grant access to a government record or deny a request for access to a government record as soon as possible, but not later than seven business days after receiving the request, provided that the record is currently available and not in storage or archived. In the event a custodian fails to respond within seven business days after receiving a request, the failure to respond shall be deemed a denial of the request, unless the requestor has elected not to provide a name, address or telephone number, or other means of contacting the requestor. If the requestor has elected not to provide a name, address, or telephone number, or other means of contacting the requestor, the custodian shall not be required to respond until the requestor reappears before the custodian seeking a response to the original request. If the government record is in storage or archived, the requestor shall be so advised within seven business days after the custodian receives the request. The requestor shall be advised by the custodian when the record can be made available. If the record is not made available by that time, access shall be deemed denied.

j. A custodian shall post prominently in public view in the part or parts of the office or offices of the custodian that are open to or frequented by the public a statement that sets forth in clear, concise and specific terms the right to appeal a denial of, or failure to provide, access to a government record by any person for inspection, examination, or copying or for purchase of copies thereof and the procedure by which an appeal may be filed.

k. The files maintained by the Office of the Public Defender that relate to the handling of any case shall be considered

confidential and shall not be open to inspection by any person unless authorized by law, court order, or the State Public Defender.
(cf: P.L.2014, c.19, s.3)

2. (New section) In addition to any other responsibility conferred by P.L.1963, c.73 (C.47:1A-1 et seq.), and notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the custodian of any government record listed as follows shall make that record available to the public for inspection, examination, copying, and printing at no charge by posting the government record on a searchable Internet website, maintained by, or made available to, the custodian: minutes, agendas, budgets, employee salary, employment contracts, collective bargaining agreements, resolutions, and ordinances.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, and as permitted by law, a custodian may make available other government records on the searchable Internet website, but shall not be required do so.

A government record required to be posted pursuant to this section, shall be posted on the website as soon as possible but not later than 30 days after its creation. Once a government record is posted on a website, it shall remain posted for at least five years following the initial posting.

The Internet website posting requirements established by this section for the specified categories of government records shall apply only to government records created after the effective date of this act, P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

3. This act shall take effect on the 60th day after the date of enactment.

STATEMENT

This bill requires that if a government record is readily available on a public agency's website, the records custodian must advise the requester to that effect, and provide the requester with the specific uniform resource locator (URL) or equally useful and direct means of locating the material for each page of the website on which the requested information appears. However, if the requester does not have access to a computer or would like the custodian to fulfill the request, the request would be required to be processed and fulfilled pursuant to the Open Public Records Act (OPRA).

The bill also provides that, in addition to any other responsibility conferred by OPRA, the custodian must make the following government records available to the public for inspection, examination, copying, and printing at no charge by posting the

government record on a searchable website, maintained by, or made available to, the custodian: minutes, agendas, budgets, employee salary, employment contracts, collective bargaining agreements, resolutions, and ordinances. Under the bill, a custodian may make available other government records on the searchable website. A government record required to be posted pursuant to the bill which is created after the bill's effective date must be posted not later than 30 days after its creation. Once a government record is posted on the website, it must remain posted for at least five years following the initial posting. The bill is prospective in application.