

WAC 138-12-040 Processing of public records requests—General.

(1) **Order of response.** The public records officer or designee will process requests in the order allowing the most requests to be processed in the most efficient manner.

(2) **Acknowledging receipt of request.** Within five business days of receipt of the request, the public records officer will do one or more of the following:

(a) Make the records available for inspection or copying; or

(b) If copies or scanned records are requested and terms of payment are met, send the copies to the requestor;

(c) Provide a reasonable estimate of when records will be available; or

(d) If the request is unclear or does not sufficiently identify the requested records, request clarification from the requestor. Such clarification may be requested and provided by telephone. The public records officer or designee may revise the estimate of when records will be available; or

(e) Deny the request.

(3) **Clarifications.**

(a) If a requestor fails to respond to a request to clarify the request and the entire request is unclear, the request may be closed without further action.

(b) If portions of the request are clear, those portions of the request will be processed.

(4) **Failure to respond.** If the ombuds does not respond in writing within five business days of receipt of the request for disclosure, the requestor should consider contacting the public records officer to determine the reason for the failure to respond.

(5) **Protecting rights of others.** In the event that the requested records contain information that may affect rights of others and may be exempt from disclosure, the public records officer may, prior to providing the records, give notice to such others whose rights may be affected by the disclosure. Such notice should be given so as to make it possible for those other persons to contact the requestor and ask him or her to revise the request, or, if necessary, seek an order from a court to prevent or limit the disclosure. The notice to the affected persons will include a copy of the request.

(6) **Records exempt from disclosure.** Some records are exempt from disclosure, in whole or in part. If the ombuds office believes that a record is exempt from disclosure and should be withheld in whole or in part, the public records officer will state the specific exemption and provide a brief explanation of why the record or a portion of the record is being withheld or redacted. If only a portion of a record is exempt from disclosure, but the remainder is not exempt, the public records officer will redact the exempt portions, provide the nonexempt portions, and indicate to the requestor why portions of the record are being redacted.

(7) **Inspection of records.**

(a) Consistent with other demands, the ombuds office shall promptly provide space to inspect public records. No member of the public may remove a record from the viewing area or disassemble or alter any record. The requestor shall indicate which documents he or she wishes the agency to copy.

(b) The requestor must claim or review the assembled records within thirty days of the ombuds office notification to him or her that the records are available for inspection. The agency will notify

the requestor in writing of this requirement and inform the requestor that he or she should contact the agency to make arrangements to claim or review the records. If the requestor or a representative of the requestor fails to claim or review the records within the thirty-day period or make other arrangements, the ombuds office may close the request and refile the assembled records. Other public records requests can be processed ahead of a subsequent request by the same person for the same or almost identical records, which can be processed as a new request.

(8) **Providing copies of records.** After inspection is complete, the public records officer or designee shall make the requested copies or arrange for copying.

(9) **Providing records in installments.** When the request is for a large number of records or records requiring extensive review for confidential information, the public records officer or designee will provide access for inspection and copying in installments, if he or she reasonably determines that it would be practical to provide the records in that way. If, within thirty days, the requestor fails to inspect the entire set of records or one or more of the installments, the public records officer or designee may stop searching for the remaining records and close the request.

(10) **Completion of inspection.** When the inspection of the requested records is complete and all requested copies are provided, the public records officer or designee will indicate that the ombuds office has completed a diligent search for the requested records and made any located nonexempt records available for inspection.

(11) **Closing withdrawn or abandoned request.** When the requestor either withdraws the request or fails to fulfill his or her obligations to inspect the records or pay the deposit or final payment for the requested copies, the public records officer will close the request and indicate to the requestor that the ombuds office has closed the request.

(12) **Later discovered records.** If, after the ombuds office has informed the requestor that it has provided all available records, the ombuds office becomes aware of additional responsive records existing at the time of the request, it will promptly inform the requestor of the additional documents and provide them on an expedited basis.

(13) Detailed policy can be found on office website at <https://oco.wa.gov/>.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 42.56.040, 42.56.070, 34.05.310 - [34.05.]395. WSR 21-20-083, § 138-12-040, filed 9/30/21, effective 10/31/21.]