

Rule 509. Access to Financial Records

<Rule effective Jan. 1, 2009. See also, rule effective until Jan. 1, 2009.>

(a) General Policy. Financial records of the Unified Judicial System are presumed to be open to any member of the public for inspection or copying during established business hours. The term “financial records” is defined as any account, contract, invoice or equivalent dealing with: 1) the receipt or disbursement of funds appropriated to the system; or 2) acquisition, use or disposal of services, supplies, materials, equipment or property secured through funds appropriated to the system.

(b) Accessibility. All financial records are accessible to the public except the following:

(1) any part of a record setting forth information to which access is otherwise restricted by federal law, state law, court rule, court order or court policy;

(2) any part of a record setting forth a person’s social security number, home address, home telephone number, date of birth, operator’s license number, e-mail address, or other personal information;

(3) any part of a record setting forth financial institution account numbers, credit card numbers, personal identification numbers (PINs) and passwords used to secure accounts;

(4) any part of a record setting forth information presenting a risk to personal security, personal privacy, or the fair, impartial and orderly administration of justice, as determined by the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania.

(c) Procedure for Requesting Access.

(1) A request to inspect or obtain copies of records accessible pursuant to this rule and in possession or control of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania courts shall be made in writing to the records manager, as designated by the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania. A request to inspect or obtain copies of records accessible pursuant to this rule and in possession or control of a court of a judicial district shall be made in writing to the records manager, as designated by the president judge. A written request may be submitted in person, by mail, by e-mail, by facsimile, or, to the extent provided, any other electronic means, on a form provided by the Administrative Office.

Note: Information related to procedures applicable to written requests to the AOPC may be found on the UJS website, located at www.courts.state.pa.us. Information related to procedures applicable to requests for courts within a judicial district should be posted on the local court’s website.

(2) A request should identify or describe the records sought with sufficient specificity to enable the records manager to ascertain which records are being requested. A request need not include any explanation of the requester’s reason for requesting or intended use of the records.

(3) The records manager shall not be required to create financial records which do not currently exist or to compile, maintain, format or organize such records in a manner in which the records are not currently compiled, maintained, formatted or organized.

(4) Within 10 business days of receipt of a written request, the records manager shall respond in one of the following manners:

- (i) fulfill the request, or if there are applicable fees and costs that must be paid by the requester, notify requester that the information is available upon payment of same;
- (ii) notify the requester in writing that the requester has not complied with provisions in this rule and specifically identify the reason(s) why;
- (iii) notify the requester in writing that the information cannot be provided and specifically identify the reason(s) why;
- (iv) notify the requester in writing that the request has been received and the expected date that the information will be available, not to exceed 30 business days.

Note: Subsection (c)(4)(iv) contemplates that bona fide reasons may impede the ability of the records manager to fulfill a request within 10 business days (e.g., extensive redaction required of personal identifiers; retrieval of a record(s) stored in a remote location may be required; timely response cannot be accomplished due to staffing limitations; or the extent or nature of the request precludes a response within the requisite time period).

(5) If the AOPC records manager denies a written request for access, the denial may be appealed in writing within 15 business days of the mailing date of the written response by the records manager to the Court Administrator of Pennsylvania or designee. Within 20 business days of receipt of the appeal, the Court Administrator or designee shall make a determination and forward it in writing to the requester. This remedy need not be exhausted before other relief is sought. Any further appeal shall be subject to Chapter 15, Judicial Review of Governmental Determinations, of the Pennsylvania Rules of Appellate Procedure.

If the records manager of a judicial district denies a written request for access, the denial may be appealed in writing within 15 business days of the mailing date of the written response by the records manager to the president judge or designee. Within 20 business days of receipt of the appeal, the president judge or designee shall make a determination and forward it in writing to the requester. This remedy need not be exhausted before other relief is sought. Any further appeal shall be subject to Chapter 15, Judicial Review of Governmental Determination, of the Pennsylvania Rules of Appellate Procedure.

(d) Fees.

- (1) Reasonable costs incurred in providing public access to records may be charged pursuant to this rule. Such costs may include, but are not limited to, postage, photocopying, copying onto electronic media, transmission by facsimile or other electronic means, and other means of duplication.
- (2) Prior to granting a request for access in accordance with this rule, the records manager may require a requester to prepay an estimate of the fees associated with the request, if the fees are expected to exceed \$100.

(e) Publication of Contract Information. The Administrative Office shall make contract information available on the Unified Judicial System's website.

Note: The Pennsylvania judiciary's long-standing practice of providing open, public access to its records, both administrative and case-related, has been formalized in this rule and other policies adopted by the Supreme Court. The underlying premise for public access policies and practices in the Unified Judicial System is always the presumption of open records.

Initially promulgated by the Supreme Court on May 14, 2007, this rule furthers the judiciary's commitment to establishing systematic processes for requesting and accessing state court system records. The rule took effect July 1, 2007.

The enactment of revisions to the Right-to-Know Law (Act 3 of 2008) occurred on February 14, 2008. Act 3 includes the judiciary only as it pertains to access of financial records, as defined by the Act, and regarding the Internet publication of judiciary contracts by the Commonwealth's Treasury Department. Section 304 [FN1] of Act 3 of 2008 provides that a "judicial agency shall provide financial records in accordance with this act or any rule or order of court providing equal or greater access to the records." [Emphasis added.]

This rule, as amended, is promulgated pursuant to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's constitutional authority regarding the administration of the courts under Article V, Section 10 and Section 304 of Act 3 of 2008. The expansion of the scope of this rule is in accordance with the continuing effort to promote the Unified Judicial System's policy of the public's right of access to records that deal with the use of public funds.

Pursuant to the Supreme Court's Order of June 23, 2008, access to financial records and publication of contract information of the Unified Judicial System shall be provided in accordance with this rule.