

*County of Kent*

**Procedures and Standards – Freedom of Information Act**

- I. **PURPOSE:** These procedures and standards have been developed by the County Administrator’s Office to implement an Administrative Policy on Michigan Freedom of Information Act compliance adopted by the Board of Commissioners.
  
- II. **DEFINITIONS:**
  - A. **FOIA:** The Michigan Freedom of Information Act, codified at MCLA 15.321 et seq.
  
  - B. **FOIA Coordinator:** The County Administrator/Controller designates the Assistant Corporate Counsel as the Chief FOIA Coordinator for all Departments, elected offices and the Board of Commissioners. Each County Department and Elected Offices will designate certain employees as FOIA Coordinators and Assistants to act on his/her behalf.
  
  - C. **Public Body:** “Public Body” shall include, but not be limited to, the following:
    - C.1 **Departments:** Kent County departments including the Administrator’s Office, Fiscal Services/Purchasing, Property Description and Mapping, Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities Management, Bureau of Equalization, Health, Public Works, Community Action, Veterans Services, and Parks.
  
    - C.2 **Elected Officers:** Kent County elected officers including the County Clerk/Register of Deeds, Treasurer’s Office, Sheriff’s Office, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, and Drain Commissioner’s Office.
      - C.2.a. **Exception:** County Clerk and Clerk’s employees when acting as clerks of the Circuit Court do not represent a Public Body.
  
  - D. **Public Record:** A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created. Exception: computer software.
  
  - E. **Redaction:** Editing of a public record by deletion, masking or separation to remove exempt material from nonexempt material.
  
  - F. **Requesting Person:** An individual, corporation, limited liability company, partnership, firm, organization, association, governmental entity, or other legal entity. A request from a person, other than an individual who qualifies as indigent under section 4(2)(a), must include the requesting person's complete name, address, and contact information, and, if the request is made by a person other than an individual, the complete name, address, and contact information of the person's agent who is an

individual. An address must be written in compliance with United States Postal Service addressing standards. Contact information must include a valid telephone number or electronic mail address.

- G. Writing:** The written word, a photocopy, photograph, map, microfilm, sound, symbol, computer file, e-mail, or digitally scanned image.
- H. Fee:** The total fee or any component of the total fee calculated under section 4 of the FOIA, including any deposit.

### **III. STANDARDS:**

#### **A. FOIA Coordinators:**

- A.1. Designation:** The County Assistant Corporate Counsel, as chief County FOIA Coordinator, may designate other individuals to act on his/her behalf, and may amend such designations at his/her discretion.
- A.2. Appointment:** The County Administrator/Controller appoints the County Assistant Corporate Counsel as Chief Administrative FOIA Coordinator. The following Kent County officers, officials or employees shall be trained to serve as Departmental FOIA Coordinators:

- A.2.a.** Sheriff, Undersheriff, and their designees
- A.2.b.** Prosecuting Attorney
- A.2.c.** County Clerk/Register of Deeds
- A.2.d.** Treasurer
- A.2.e.** Drain Commissioner
- A.2.f.** Fiscal Services Director
- A.2.g.** Human Resources Director
- A.2.h.** Human Resources Managers
- A.2.i.** **Animal Shelter Supervisor**
- A.2.j.** Purchasing Manager
- A.2.k.** Information Technology Director
- A.2.l.** Facilities Management Director
- A.2.m.** Equalization Director
- A.2.n.** Administrative Health Officer
- A.2.o.** Public Health Enforcement Officer
- A.2.p.** Department of Public Works Director
- A.2.q.** Parks Director
- A.2.r.** Kent County Community Action Director

- A.3. Responsibilities:** A FOIA Coordinator shall be responsible for accepting and processing requests for the Public Body's public records, and shall be responsible for granting or denying public records where appropriate.

- A.4. Training:** A FOIA Coordinator shall receive training in the application of FOIA and the use of the required forms on the FOIA portal, and shall be advised of amendments to FOIA as necessary. A FOIA Coordinator shall seek the advice of County Corporate Counsel's Office, or the Public Body's retained counsel where appropriate, when questions of legal interpretation arise.
- A.5. Form Packet:** A FOIA Coordinator shall use the Michigan FOIA Response Forms, Notice of Right to Appeal and Affidavit of Fee Waiver available in the FOIA portal electronically to respond to requests.
- A.6. Filed Requests:** A FOIA Coordinator shall keep all FOIA requests, responses and appeals on file for no less than one (1) year from the date of final response or written decision on appeal, whichever is later.
- A.7. Monitoring:** A FOIA Coordinator shall ensure that any FOIA requests he/she may receive by electronic device or system are monitored and responded to by a responsible person when the FOIA Coordinator will not have access to said device or system for more than one (1) business day.
- A.8. Creating Records:** The County is not obligated to create a new public record or make a compilation or summary of information which does not already exist. Neither the FOIA Coordinator nor other County staff are obligated to provide answers to questions contained in requests for public records or regarding the content of the records themselves.
- A.9. Free Copy of Procedures and Guidelines and Written Public Summary:** The County will make this Procedures and Guidelines document and the Written Public Summary publicly available without charge. A copy of this Procedures and Guidelines document and the County's Written Public Summary will be publicly available on the County's website or upon request.

#### **IV. PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES:**

- A. Request:** The requesting person shall provide the Public Body with a written request that describes a public record sufficiently to enable the Public Body's FOIA Coordinator to find it. The written request may be transmitted by facsimile, electronic mail or other electronic means, but if it is transmitted by such means, it will be considered received by the Public Body one (1) business day after the transmission is made.
  - A.1. Spam or Junk-mail Folder:** If a request is sent by email and delivered to a County spam or junk-mail folder, the request is not deemed received until one day after the FOIA Coordinator first becomes aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall note in the FOIA log both the date the request was delivered

to the spam or junk-mail folder and the date the FOIA Coordinator became aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall review County spam and junk-mail folders on a regular basis, which shall be no less than once a month.

- A.2. Form of Request:** No specific form to submit a request for a public record is required. However, the FOIA Coordinator will inform the requestor of the electronic Request Form available on the FOIA portal for use by the public.
  - A.3. Inspection:** Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the County may be submitted on the County's FOIA portal, in any other form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.), or by verbal request.
  - A.4. Verbal Requests:** Verbal requests for records will be documented by the County on the County's FOIA portal. If a person makes a verbal, non-written request for information believed to be available on the County's website, where practicable and to the best ability of the employee receiving the request, shall inform of the pertinent website address.
  - A.5. Describe Record:** A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable County personnel to identify and find the requested public record.
  - A.6. Format of Record:** A person may request that public records be provided on non-paper physical media, emailed, faxed, delivered by first-class mail, or otherwise provided to him or her in digital form in lieu of paper copies. The County will comply with the request only if it possesses the necessary technological capability to provide records in the requested non-paper physical media format.
  - A.7. Subscription:** A person may subscribe to future issues of public records that are created, issued, or disseminated by the County on a regular basis. A subscription is valid for up to 6 months and may be renewed by the subscriber.
  - A.8. Certified copies:** The FOIA Coordinator shall, upon written request, furnish a certified copy of a public record at no additional cost to the person requesting the public record.
- B. Forward Request to FOIA Coordinators:** All County officers and employees who receive a FOIA request in paper form shall note the date of receipt on the request and forward it within one (1) business day to the FOIA Coordinator for the department or agency where the records are kept. If a request is submitted on the FOIA portal electronically where a department is not known to the requestor, the request will be assigned to the department or elected office that is the holder or office in possession of the record by Corporate Counsel's Office. If a County officer or employee is unable to determine where to direct the request, it

shall be submitted to County Corporate Counsel's Office within one (1) business day of receipt.

**C. Review Request: After receiving a request and within sufficient time to ensure compliance with FOIA response requirements, a FOIA Coordinator shall:**

- C.1. Determine if there is an existing public record that satisfies the request.
- C.2. Determine if any requested records, in whole or in part, are subject to denial or exempt from disclosure. A requested record which is subject to denial or exempt from disclosure, in whole or in part, shall not be disclosed unless approved by County Corporate Counsel.

**D. Determine if Request Contains Grounds for Denial:**

- D.1. A FOIA request shall be denied if the requesting person is serving a sentence of imprisonment in a local, state, or federal correctional facility.
- D.2. A FOIA request shall be denied if the requesting person does not describe a public record sufficiently to enable the Public Body to find it.
- D.3. A FOIA request shall be denied if it requires the Public Body to create a new public record or make a compilation, summary, or report of information.

**E. Examine Request for Exemptions:** The following public records are exempt from disclosure, unless they are otherwise required to be made available to the public, or to a party in a contested case under the Administrative Procedures Act (MLCA 24.201 et seq., Public Act 306 of 1969). Any questions concerning the general legal parameters of an exemption, or applicability in a particular situation, should be directed to County Corporate Counsel or to the Public Body's retained counsel.

- E.1. **Privacy:** Information of a personal nature where disclosure would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of an individual's privacy.
- E.2. **Social Security Numbers:** Records disclosing the social security number of an individual.
- E.3. **Privileged Information:** Information subject to the attorney-client, physician-patient, psychologist-patient or religious practitioner privileges.
- E.4. **Communications Within and Between Public Bodies:** Communications and notes of an advisory nature within a Public Body or between Public Bodies if:

- E.4.a.** The communications cover other than purely factual materials and the opinion cannot be redacted.
- E.4.b.** The communications are preliminary to a final agency determination of policy or action.
- E.4.c.** The Public Body shows that the public interest in encouraging frank communications between public officials and employees clearly outweighs the public interest in disclosure.
- E.5. Another Public Body’s Exempt Material:** Information in the possession of a Public Body received from another Public Body in the course of business, which would be exempt from disclosure if requested of the originating Public Body.
- E.6. Appraisals:** Appraisals of real property, but only until a contract is entered into or three (3) years have elapsed since the appraisal was made.
- E.7. Employment Tests:** Test questions/answers, scoring keys, other examination instruments or data used to administer a license or evaluate persons for employment with a Public Body, unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in nondisclosure.
- E.8. Medical/Psychological Data:** Medical, counseling, or psychological facts/evaluations, if the individual’s identity would be revealed by disclosure, including protected health information, as defined in 45 CFR160.103.
- E.9. Bids/Proposals:** A bid or proposal, but only prior to public opening, or if no public opening, until expiration of the submission deadline.
- E.10. Product Testing:** Testing data developed by a Public Body to determine whether bidders’ products meet specifications. Exemption does not apply after one (1) year from the date the Public Body completes the testing.
- E.11. Trade Secrets/Financial Information:** Trade secrets or commercial or financial information voluntarily provided to a Public Body for use in developing government policy if (a) the Public Body has promised to keep the information confidential, (b) the promise is authorized by the County Administrator/Controller or elected official at the time made, and (c) a general description of the information is recorded by the Public Body within a reasonable period of time after it is submitted, kept in a central location within the Public Body, and made available to a requesting person.

**Exception:** This exemption does not apply to information required to be submitted to a Public Body by law, or as a condition of receiving a government contract, license, or other benefit.

- E.12. Security:** Records of a Public Body’s security measures, plans, codes, combinations, passwords, passes, and keys.
- E.13** Records concerning safety or security measures related to public or private persons or property, including building, public works, and public water supply designs related to ongoing security measures of a public body, plans and capabilities for responding to violations of the Michigan Anti-Terrorism Act, emergency response plans, risk planning documents, threat assessments, and domestic preparedness strategies, and cybersecurity plans, assessments, or vulnerabilities, unless disclosure would not impair the public body's ability to protect the safety or security of persons or property, or unless public interest in disclosure outweighs public interest in nondisclosure.
- E.14** Information that would identify or provide a means of identifying a person that may, as a result of disclosure of the information, become a victim of a cybersecurity incident or that would disclose a person's cybersecurity plans or cybersecurity-related practices, procedures, methods, results, organizational information system infrastructure, hardware, or software.
- E.15** Information that would reveal the identity of a party who proceeds anonymously in a civil action in which the party alleges that the party was the victim of sexual misconduct. As used in this subdivision, "sexual misconduct" means the conduct described in section 90, 136, 145a, 145b, 145c, 520b, 520c, 520d, 520e, or 520g of the Michigan penal code, 1931 PA 328, MCL 750.90, 750.136, 750.145a, 750.145b, 750.145c, 750.520b, 750.520c, 750.520d, 750.520e, and 750.520g, regardless of whether the conduct resulted in a criminal conviction.
- E.16. Civil Actions:** Records relating to a civil action in which the requesting person and Public Body are parties.
- E.17. Lockup Security:** Information that would prejudice a Public Body’s ability to maintain physical security of custodial or penal institutions unless public interest in disclosure outweighs public interest in nondisclosure.
- E.18. Law Enforcement:** The following information is exempt:
  - E.18.a.** Investigative records compiled for law enforcement purposes, but only to the extent that disclosure would (i) interfere with law enforcement proceedings, (ii) deprive a person of the right to a fair trial, (iii) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy, (iv)

identify a confidential source in a criminal investigation or disclose his/her information, (v) disclose law enforcement investigative techniques/procedures, or (vi) endanger the life or physical safety of law enforcement personnel.

**E.18.b.** Records of law enforcement communication codes or plans for deployment unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in nondisclosure.

**E.18.c.** Public records of a law enforcement agency which would do any of the following, unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in nondisclosure:

- Identify or provide means to identify an officer, undercover or plainclothes officer, or informant.
- Disclose an officer's personal address/telephone number, special skills, name/address/telephone number of family members, relatives, children, or parents.
- Disclose operational instructions for officers.
- Disclose contents of staff manuals.
- Endanger the life or safety of officers or their families, relatives, children, parents, or informers.
- Disclose personnel records of law enforcement agencies.
- Identify or provide means of identifying residences that law enforcement agencies are requested to check in the absence of the owner/lessee.

**E.19. Archaeological Sites:** Information that would reveal the exact location of archaeological sites.

**E.20. Other Exemptions:** Information specifically exempted by statute, including but not limited to:

**E.17.a.** Deliberative information contained in the minutes of a Public Body's closed session.

**E.17.b.** Report and recommendations of a legislative corrections ombudsman or a children's ombudsman.



- E.17.c** Crime victim's file and testimony before the Crime Victims Compensation Commission; crime victim's address and telephone number maintained by a law enforcement agency.
- E.17.d.** Certain information under the Firearms Act contained in an order or disposition filed with the State Police.
- E.17.e.** Information maintained by a fire chief on quantity and location of hazardous chemicals.
- E.17.f.** Information contained in voter registration records identifying the office that received a voting application, an individual's declination to register, or a registered voter's driver license or state personal identification number, date of birth or telephone number.
- E.17.g.** Affidavits in the possession of the register of deeds stating the value of real estate, and any associated receipts.
- E.17.h.** Information on HIV infection, except for certain statistical data.
- E.17.i.** Information concerning the injury and benefits of a Worker's Disability Compensation claimant, except for statistical data.
- E.17.j.** Detailed description and value of lost property in the possession of a law enforcement agency.
- E.17.k.** Home addresses, telephone numbers, personnel records of employees of the Department of Corrections or a forensic psychiatry center or psychiatric hospital that houses prisoners.

**F. Respond to Request:** The FOIA Coordinator shall respond to a request, using the required form packet, within five (5) business days from the date upon which he/she receives the request, unless a 10-day extension is requested or otherwise agreed to in writing by the requesting person.

**G. Process Response:** If the requested record is not subject to one of the grounds for denial or an exemption, it shall be processed in the following manner:

**G.1. Response Options:** Within five (5) business days, unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the requesting person, the FOIA Coordinator shall do one of the following:

**G.1.a.** Grant the request.

**G.1.b.** Deny the request and provide the reason why the request is subject to denial or exempt.

**G.1.c.** Grant the request in part and deny the request in part.

**G.1.d.** Using FOIA response form, provide notice extending for not more than ten (10) business days the time in which the Public Body shall respond to the request. The notice shall contain the reasons for the extension and the date by which the Public Body will respond to the request. Not more than one (1) notice of extension shall be issued for a particular reason.

**G.2. Denial of a Request:** If the request is denied or denied in part, the FOIA Coordinator will issue a Notice of Denial which shall provide in the applicable circumstance:

**G.2.a.** An explanation as to why a requested public record is exempt from disclosure; or

**G.2.b.** A certificate that the requested record does not exist under the name or description provided by the requestor, or another name reasonably known by the County; or

**G.2.c.** An explanation or description of the public record or information within a public record that is separated or deleted from the public record; and

**G.2.d.** An explanation of the person's right to submit an appeal of the denial to either the office of the County Board of Commissioners or seek judicial review in the Kent County Circuit Court; and

**G.2.e.** An explanation of the right to receive attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements as well actual or compensatory damages, and punitive damages of \$1,000, should they prevail in Circuit Court.

**G.2.f.** The Notice of Denial shall be signed by the FOIA Coordinator.

**Exception:** If a request does not sufficiently describe a public record, the FOIA Coordinator may, in lieu of issuing a Notice of Denial indicating that the request is deficient, seek clarification or amendment of the request by the person making the request. Any clarification or amendment will be considered a new request subject to the timelines described in this Section.

**G.3. Redaction:** If a public record contains both exempt and nonexempt material, the FOIA Coordinator shall edit the record by deletion, masking or separation of the exempt from the nonexempt material, and shall then provide the nonexempt material to the requesting person. The FOIA Coordinator shall generally describe the redacted material unless the description would reveal its contents.

- G.4. Inspection of Records:** The County shall provide reasonable facilities and opportunities for persons to examine and inspect public records during normal business hours. The FOIA Coordinator is authorized to promulgate rules regulating the manner in which records may be viewed so as to protect County records from loss, alteration, mutilation, or destruction and to prevent excessive interference with normal County operations.
- G.5. Website link to Procedures and Guidelines:** A link maintained on the County's website at [www.accesskent.com](http://www.accesskent.com) to these Procedures and Guidelines and the Written Public Summary will be provided to the requestor. If a hard copy of these documents are requested, copies will be provided free of charge.

## **H. Fees for Public Records:**

- H.1. Permissible Fees:** If the request is granted, or granted in part, the FOIA Coordinator will require that payment be made in full for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available. If the cost of processing a FOIA request is \$50 or less, the requester will be notified of the amount due and where the documents can be obtained.
- H.2. Deposits:** In making the request for a good-faith deposit, the FOIA Coordinator shall provide the requestor with a detailed itemization of the allowable costs estimated to be incurred by the County to process the request and also provide a best efforts estimate of a time frame it will take the County to provide the records to the requestor. The best efforts estimate shall be nonbinding on the County, but will be made in good faith and will strive to be reasonably accurate, given the nature of the request in the particular instance, so as to provide the requested records in a manner based on the public policy expressed by Section 1 of the FOIA.
- H.2.a.** If the fee estimate is expected to exceed \$50.00 based on a good-faith calculation, the requestor will be asked to provide a deposit not exceeding one-half of the total estimated fee.
- H.2.b.** If a request for public records is from a person who has not paid the County in full for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the FOIA Coordinator will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before beginning to search for a public record for any subsequent written request by that person when all of the following conditions exist:

1. The final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
2. The public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the County's possession;
3. The public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the time frame estimated by the County to provide the records;
4. Ninety (90) days have passed since the FOIA Coordinator notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
5. The individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the County; and
6. The FOIA Coordinator has calculated a detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased estimated fee deposit.

**H.2.c.** The FOIA Coordinator will not require an increased estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:

1. The person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the County;
2. The County is subsequently paid in full for the applicable prior written request; or
3. Three hundred sixty-five (365) days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the County.

**H.3. Calculation of Fees:** The FOIA Coordinator shall provide a detailed itemization of the allowable costs incurred to process the request to the person making the request.

**H.3.a.** A fee may be charged for the labor cost of copying/duplication.

**H.3.b.** A fee will *not* be charged for the labor cost of search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information *unless* failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the County because of the nature of the request in the particular instance, and the County specifically identifies the nature of the unreasonably high costs.

The following factors shall be used to determine an unreasonably high cost to the County:

1. Volume of the public record requested.

2. Amount of time spent to search for, examine, review and separate exempt from non-exempt information in the record requested.
3. Whether the public records are from more than one County department or whether various County offices are necessary to respond to the request.
4. The available staffing to respond to the request.
5. Any other similar factors identified by the FOIA Coordinator in responding to the particular request.

**H.3.c. Labor Costs:** The Michigan FOIA statute permits the County to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:

1. Labor costs associated with copying or duplication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
2. Labor costs associated with searching for, locating, and examining a requested public record, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the County.
3. Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the County.
4. The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the County's website if the requester asks for the County to make copies.
5. The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the requester asks for records in non-paper physical media. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the County's website if you ask for the County to make copies.
6. The cost to mail or send a public record to a requestor.

**Calculation of Labor costs:** Labor costs will be calculated based on the following requirements:

1. All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15-minute increments, with all partial time increments rounded down. If the time involved is less than 15 minutes, there will be no charge. Except that labor cost for duplication or publication will be charged in 1-minute increments, with all partial increments rounded down.

2. Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid County employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.
3. Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits.
4. The County may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.
5. Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs unless agreed to by the requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.
6. Contracted labor costs will be charged at an hourly rate not to exceed an amount equal to 6 times the state minimum hourly wage rate determined by the Workforce Opportunity Wage Act, 2014, PA 138.

**H.3.d. Non-paper Physical Media:** The cost to provide records on non-paper physical media when so requested will be based on the following requirements:

1. Computer disks, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
2. This cost will only be assessed if the County has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.
3. The County will procure any non-paper media and will not accept media from the requestor in order to ensure integrity of the County's technology infrastructure.

**H.3.e. Paper Copies:** The cost to provide paper copies of records will be based on the following requirements:

1. Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will be as determined by the County's Purchasing Division. Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.
2. The County will provide records using double-sided printing if it is cost-saving and available.

**H.3.f. Mailing Costs:** The cost to mail records to a requestor will be based on the following requirements: The actual cost to mail public records using a reasonably economical and justified means.

1. The County may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
2. No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless specified by the requestor.

**H.4. Reduction of Fees:** If the FOIA Coordinator does not respond to a written request in a timely manner, the County will:

1. Reduce the labor costs by 5% for each day the County exceeds the time permitted under FOIA up to a 50% maximum reduction, if *any* of the following applies:
  - a. The County's late response was willful and intentional, or
  - b. The written request conveyed a request for information within the first 250 words of the body of a letter, facsimile, email, or email attachment, or
  - c. The written request included the words, characters, or abbreviations for "freedom of information," "information," "FOIA," "copy" or a recognizable misspelling of such, or legal code reference to MCL 15. 231, et seq. or 1976 Public Act 442 on the front of an envelope or in the subject line of an email, letter, or facsimile cover page.
2. Fully note the charge reduction in the Detailed Itemization of Costs Form.

**H.5. Waiver of Fees:** The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole judgment of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduced fee is in the public interest because it can be considered as primarily benefitting the general public.

**H.6. Discounted Fees:**

**H.6.a. Indigence:** The FOIA Coordinator will discount the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request if the person requesting a public record submits an affidavit stating that they are:

1. Indigent and receiving specific public assistance, or
2. If not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigence.

An individual is not eligible to receive the waiver if:

1. The requestor has previously received discounted copies of public records from the County twice during the calendar year; or
2. The requestor requests information in connection with other persons who are offering or providing payment to make the request.

The FOIA Coordinator will make a Fee Waiver Affidavit Form available for use by the public.

**H.6.b. Nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally disabled or mentally ill individuals:** The FOIA Coordinator will discount the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request from:

1. A nonprofit organization formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the federal developmental disabilities assistance and bill of rights act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, and the protection and advocacy for individuals with mental illness act, Public Law 99-319, or their successors, if the request meets all of the following requirements:
  - a. Is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients.
  - b. Is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the mental health code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931.
  - c. Is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the public body.

## **I. Appeal:**

**I.1. Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record:** When a requestor believes that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, he or she may appeal to the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners by filing an appeal of the denial with the office of the County Board of Commissioners. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify the reason or reasons the requestor is seeking a reversal of the denial.

**I.1.a. Receipt of Appeal:** The County Board of Commissioners is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled County Board of Commissioners meeting following submission of the written appeal.

**I.1.b. Response to Appeal:** Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners will respond in writing by:

1. Reversing the disclosure denial; or
2. Upholding the disclosure denial; or
3. Reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part; or
4. Under unusual circumstances, issue a notice extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the County



Board of Commissioners shall respond to the written appeal. The County Board of Commissioners shall not issue more than 1 notice of extension for a particular written appeal.

**I.1.c. Requesting Person's Rights on Denial of Appeal:** If the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners fails to respond to a written appeal, or if the County Board of Commissioners upholds all or a portion of the disclosure denial that is the subject of the written appeal, the requesting person may seek judicial review of the nondisclosure by commencing a civil action in Circuit Court.

Whether or not a requestor submitted an appeal of a denial to the County Board, he or she may file a civil action in the Kent County Circuit Court within 180 days after the County's final determination to deny the request.

**I.2. Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee:** If a requestor believes that the fee charged by the County to process a FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law or under this policy, procedures and standards, he or she must first appeal to the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners by submitting a written appeal for a fee reduction to the office of the County Board of Commissioners. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted.

**I.2.a. Receipt of Appeal:** The County Board of Commissioners is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled County Board of Commissioners meeting following submission of the written appeal.

**I.2.b. Response to Appeal:** Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners will respond in writing by:

1. Waiving the fee; or
2. Reducing the fee and issuing a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee; or
3. Upholding the fee and issuing a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
4. Issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the County Board of Commissioners will respond to the written appeal. The County Board of Commissioners shall not issue more than 1 notice of extension for a particular written appeal.

Where the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners reduces or upholds the fee, the determination must include a certification from the Chair of the County Board of Commissioners that the statements in the determination are accurate and that the reduced fee amount complies with its publicly available procedures and guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA.

**I.2.c. Requesting Person's Rights on Denial of Appeal:** Within 45 days after receiving notice of the Chair of the County Board's determination of an appeal, the requesting person may commence a civil action in the Kent County Circuit Court for a fee reduction.

If a civil action is commenced against the County for an excess fee, the County is not obligated to complete the processing of the written request for the public record at issue until the court resolves the fee dispute.

An action shall not be filed in circuit court unless *one* of the following applies:

1. The County does not provide for appeals of fees, or
2. The Chair of the County Board of Commissioners failed to respond to a written appeal as required, or
3. The Chair of the County Board of Commissioners issued a determination to a written appeal.

**J. Conflict with Prior FOIA Policies and Procedures:** To the extent that any provision of these Procedures and Guidelines pertaining to the release of public records is found to be in conflict with any State statute, the applicable statute shall control.

**K. Effective Date:** These FOIA Policies and Guidelines become effective February 22, , 2024 and supersedes all prior FOIA Policies and Procedures.

**V. DISTRIBUTION:** These procedures and guidelines shall be distributed upon adoption by the County Administrator/Controller to all County departments and agencies.

**VI. PERIODIC REVIEW:** These procedures and standards shall be reviewed at least every three years by the County Administrator/Controller or his/her designee and shall be amended as needed.