



# North Smithfield Police Department



## ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

### R.I. GEN. LAWS SECTION 38-2-1 ET SEQ.

The North Smithfield Police Department is committed to providing the public with access to public records, while protecting from disclosure information about individuals maintained that would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-1. The North Smithfield Police Department provides numerous public documents to the public, media and attorneys every day in the ordinary course of business. However, for any person who does not desire to make an oral request, wishes to make a formal request or request or the request needs clarification, please complete the written form.

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-3(c.), the North Smithfield Police Department has established the following procedure regarding access to public records:

Please inform the dispatcher/officer at the front desk that you wish to make a request for public records. Captain Russell Ridge and Valerie Orellana are the Public Records Officers for the North Smithfield Police Department 401-762-1212. The hours for the Records Department are 7:30am to 2:30pm, Monday through Friday.

The dispatcher/officer will provide you with a form to complete, which lets this Department know the precise public documents you seek and assists us in processing your request in an expeditious manner.

If the public records are readily available, we will be more than happy to provide them. However, there are times/circumstances when the records will not be available at the time that you make the request. If the records are not readily available, they can either be mailed to you or you can pick them up on a designated date. The Access to Public Records Act grants a public body ten (10) business days to respond to your request. R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-7 (a). The Act further provides that "for good cause, this limit may be extended for a period not to exceed thirty (30) business days." We thank you in advance for your understanding if it is necessary, for good cause, to request this extension. Improper release of certain information could compromise the civil rights or personal safety of your fellow citizens, and we must review documents to prevent such harm.

Costs: The Access to Public Records Act gives you the opportunity to view and/or copy public

records. The cost per copied page of written public documents will be \$.15 per page for documents copyable on common business or legal size paper. You may elect to obtain public records in any and all media in which we are capable of providing them. The Act permits a reasonable charge for search and retrieval of documents. The hourly costs for a search and retrieval shall not exceed fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per hour, with no charge for the first hour. We would be more than happy to provide you with an estimate. Upon a request, we will provide a detailed itemization of the costs charges for search and retrieval.

**Public Records:** A “public record” is defined as “documents, papers, ...or other material regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received pursuant to law or ordinance in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.” Specifically with respect to police records, in addition to other records maintained by this Department that constitute “public records”, the Access to Public Records Act deems public “records relating to the management and direction of law enforcement agency and records or reports reflecting the initial arrest of an adult and the charge or charges brought against and adult.” R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-2 (4) (i.) (D).

**Redaction:** Although a document may constitute a public record, there may be some information contained on the document that may be redacted/deleted as it is exempt from disclosure under R.I. Gen Laws Section 38-2-2. In *Direct Action of Rights and Equality v. Gannon*, 713 A.2d 218 (R.I. 1998) and *The Rake v. Gorodetsky*, 452 A.2d 1144 (R.I. 1982), the Rhode Island Supreme Court held that final reports on civilian complaints of police brutality were subject to disclosure in redacted form. In addition, the Rhode Island Supreme Court stated that “in passing the APRA, the General Assembly intended to limit access to certain documents in order to avoid disclosure of confidential information to protect individuals from invasion of privacy.” *Providence Journal Company v. Kane* 577 A.2d 661, 663 (R. I. 1990). “There is no public interest to be weighed in disclosure of nonpublic records.” Id. A “balancing of interests arises only after a record has first been determined to be a public record.” Id.

**Exemptions:** The Access to Public Records Act exempts some records from public disclosure: (A)(1) ...all personal or medical information relating to an individual in any files, --including information relating to medical or psychological facts...R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-2(4)(i.)(A)(I);

(C)....records of juvenile proceedings before the family court

(D) All records maintained by law enforcement agencies for criminal law enforcement and all records relating to the detection and investigation of crime, including those maintained on any individual or complied in the course investigation by any law enforcement agency. Provided, however, such records shall not be deemed public only to the extent that the disclosure of the records or information may (a) reasonably be expected to interfere with investigations of criminal activity or with enforcement proceedings, (b) would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication, (c) could constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy (d) could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source, including a state, local or foreign agency or authority, or private institution which furnished information on a

confidential basis, or the information furnished by a confidential source,

(e) would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigation or prosecutions, or would disclose guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions or (f) could reasonably be expected to endanger the life or physical safety of any individual.

(S) Records, reports, opinions, information and statements required to be kept confidential by federal law or regulation or state rule of court, law or regulation. (i.e. information regarding juveniles, etc.)

Please be advised that this is not a complete list of documents that the Act exempts from disclosure. For a full list see R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-2.

**Appeal of Denial:** Any person or entity denied the right to inspect a record of a public body by the Public Records Officer may petition the chief administrative officer of that public body for review of the determinations made by his or her subordinates. Any petitions from a denial should be made to Chief Tim Lafferty. A final determination whether or not to allow public inspection will be made within ten (10) business days after submission of the review petition. R.I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-8.

**Complaint to the Attorney General:** If the chief administrative officer determined that the record is not subject to public inspection, the person or entity seeking disclosure may file a complaint with the Attorney General (150 South Main Street, Providence, RI 02903, telephone 274-4400) or may retain private counsel for the purposes of instituting proceedings for injunctive or declaratory relief in the superior court of the county where the record is maintained. The Act provides that "the court shall impose a civil fine not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000) against a public body or official found to have committed a knowing and willful violation of this chapter, and shall award reasonable attorney fees and cost to the prevailing plaintiff. The court shall further order a public body found to have wrongfully denied access to provide the public records at no cost to the prevailing party; provided further, that the plaintiff's case lacked a grounding in fact or in existing law or in good faith argument for the extension modification, or reversal of existing law, the court may award attorney's fees and costs to the prevailing defendant." R. I. Gen. Laws Section 38-2-9(d).

We hope this message has been of assistance.



## North Smithfield Police Department

### REQUEST FOR RECORDS UNDER THE ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

Date Requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Records Requested: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ pick up

\_\_\_\_\_ fax \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

*The North Smithfield Police Department is committed to providing you with public records in an expeditious and courteous manner.*

*Rev. 10/15/19*