

11/17/2025

Dear Attorney General Nick Brown:

The Society of Environmental Journalists (sej.org) supports the rule-making petition by the news media to improve Washington's Model Rules for implementation of the Public Records Act. It urges the Attorney General's Office to adopt the rules as it has proposed.

The Society of Environmental Journalists is a journalism organization of about 1,400 members, some in Washington State. SEJ is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism that advances public understanding of environmental issues. SEJ's Freedom of Information Task Force monitors records access and other right-to-know issues and speaks out on actions that limit access to information and inhibit journalists' ability to cover the environment and related topics.

Washington's Public Records Act requires "prompt" release of requested records, which is particularly important for journalists who often are working under deadlines that may be dictated by ongoing or forthcoming events, such as an election or a regulatory proceeding. Delays affect more than deadlines; they also undermine timely public understanding of environmental decisions. Spelling out in the Model Rules what the statute already says would help achieve prompt release.

SEJ also supports the provisions in the proposed rules that would allow public records officers to distinguish between simple and complex requests, so that simple requests can be processed more expeditiously. SEJ further supports the proposed language encouraging release of a single, identifiable record within five days when practicable. Finally, we endorse the proposed revision requiring records officers to consider whether "time is of the essence," which is frequently the case when journalists file public records requests.

SEJ would like to thank the Attorney General for taking these important steps to ensure that the Public Records Act functions as the voters intended, both for journalists and the public at large.

Sincerely,

Timothy B. Wheeler
Chair, Freedom of Information Task Force
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