



Bringing Best Practices to Local Government Records Requests

Testimony in Support of HB 2310

by The Honorable Jess Fields, *Senior Policy Analyst*

The Texas Public Information Act, Chapter 552 of the Government Code, allows citizens to request most records produced by governments. By filing requests, citizens have access to such items as financial documents, emails, and other government records that may not be accessible through other means. By being able to file public information requests, the people are able to keep their government in check.

It can be difficult, however, for citizens to find out how to file a request. Ideally, this information would be easily available on government websites. However, even if it is available, it can be very difficult to access. House Bill 2310 would give Texans a clear understanding of how to file public information act requests by linking to a webpage with that information and requiring that the link be on the front page of the government website.

Some local government websites already do an excellent job of providing easy citizen access to Public Information Act Requests. Appendix A includes the process by which a public information request can be filed in the City of San Antonio. San Antonio includes a clear menu for transparency at the bottom right hand portion of the front of their webpage (*See Appendix A, Page 1*).

San Antonio also includes a specific link that clearly points citizens to the process for filing a Public Infor-

mation Act Request, clearly indicated on a webpage that provides plentiful information on the request process. This is labeled “Request a City Document—Open Records” (*See Appendix A, Page 2*). Finally, the open government webpage includes an easy-to-use menu that includes links to frequently asked questions, a page to submit requests, and even a page to track existing requests (*See Appendix A, Page 3*).

San Antonio’s request process is clearly a best practice among Texas local governments. It gives citizens easy access to the process for filing a Public Information Act request.

House Bill 2310 would bring San Antonio’s basic idea of putting a link to the public information process on the main government webpage, where it is most accessible to the people, to all Texans. Instead of having to call phone numbers, navigate difficult and endless web menus, or march down to the government building, the people would have easy access on the front page of the website that their tax dollars pay for.

This is common sense. If a local government maintains a website, figuring out how to file a Public Information Act request should be clear and easy. ★

APPENDIX A:

San Antonio's Public Information Request Process



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

RESIDENTS **VISITORS** **BUSINESS** **YOUR GOVERNMENT** **GET CONNECTED**

SEARCH



FIESTA

Green. Fit. Friendly.

CITY MOBILE APPLICATIONS

GET CONNECTED >>





IVY R. TAYLOR
MAYOR

Ivy R. Taylor was appointed to serve as Mayor of San Antonio on July 22, 2014. Mayor Taylor was appointed by the San Antonio City Council... >

CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

MAYOR AND COUNCIL INFORMATION

CITY COUNCIL & COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDAS

FIND YOUR CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

WATCH CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS & B-SESSIONS



SHERYL SCULLEY
CITY MANAGER

Sheryl Sculley began serving as City Manager of San Antonio, Texas effective November 7, 2005. With 40 years... >

CITY FOCUS

CITY JOB VACANCIES

CORE VALUES

DEPARTMENTS

HEALTHCARE/RETIREMENT BENEFITS TASK FORCE

FEATURED INFORMATION

ADOPT A PET

FIND A PARK

PAYDAY / TITLE LOANS

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT

BIDDING & CONTRACTING

BUDGET & FINANCE INFORMATION

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES

REQUEST A CITY DOCUMENT - OPEN RECORDS

TRUTH IN TAXATION NOTICES

CITY SPOTLIGHT



PRESERVING DYNAMIC & DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS

Review and provide feedback on draft task force recommendations.

< ● ● ● ● ● ● ● >



COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Information regarding the Collective Bargaining process.

>



SATOMORROW

City's comprehensive plan kicks off April 11.

>



SOIL RELOCATION

Safe Soil Relocation Facts video now available.

>



CITY-BY-CITY TNC

Comparison of San Antonio and other major Texas cities.

>

CONNECT WITH THE CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

     

SIGN UP FOR THE CITY E-NEWS!

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

FIRE • POLICE • STREET CLOSURES • EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

CITY SERVICES AND E-SERVICES

REQUEST E-SERVICES

By phone: dial 311 or 210.207.6000

REPORTS AND MEDIA

2015 CITY BUDGET

2014 COMMUNITY SURVEY

ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MEDIA CENTER

TVSA / PATV

CITY NEWS

Friday, April 03, 2015
Councilman Treviño Unveils Eat on the Beat >

Thursday, April 02, 2015
Councilman Ron Nirenberg Seeks Active Council Oversight of... >

Thursday, April 02, 2015
Mayor Ivy R. Taylor to be Honored by AKA Sorority >

Wednesday, April 01, 2015
Downtown Sewer Cleaning Entering Last Phase >

More News Releases... >

San Antonio's "Transparency In Government" menu makes it easy for citizens to file a Public Information Act request. Citizens can easily find out how to file a public information request, submit a request using an online form, and even check the status of an existing request.

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT

BIDDING & CONTRACTING

BUDGET & FINANCE INFORMATION

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES

REQUEST A CITY DOCUMENT - OPEN RECORDS

TRUTH IN TAXATION NOTICES

OPEN GOVERNMENT

OPEN GOVERNMENT HOME

SEARCH FAQS

REQUEST/SUBMIT

MY RECORDS CENTER

PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT

RELATED SITES

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TVSA

PATV

INTV

BUDGET & FINANCE INFORMATION



OFFICE

Physical Address
City Hall
100 Military Plaza
San Antonio, TX 78205

Phone
210.207.0297

STAFF

MORAIMA MONTENEGRO
Public Information Officer



VANESSA ORTA
Paralegal



*If you experience issues with the online system please [email](#) your request.

* PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING A REQUEST *

- You may request multiple items within one request.
- Traffic Accident Reports: You must provide 2 or more of the following details, in order to obtain the record without Without the two or more details, the City will send a clarification request to you, or send the record to the Texas A General's Office for authority to withhold the record.
 - i. Date of the accident;
 - ii. Name of any person involved in the accident; and
 - iii. Specific address or the highway or street where the accident occurred.
- Choose "Environmental Site Assessments" when requesting documents from 2 or more departments listed below specify what you need and include the location's physical address.
 - Developmental Services: Zoning violations, code violations and spills
 - San Antonio Fire Department: Fires, fire inspection records, fire code violations, above and underground tanks, and chemical spills.
 - Health Department: Routine food inspections, investigations of foodborne illness and reportable disease complaints pertaining to restaurants and hotels/motels.
 - Transportation & Capital Improvements: Environmental assessments and floodplain violations

For more information in regards to the Texas Public Information Act, you may visit the following website:
texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/index.shtml



Find Information

- Find answers by entering a phrase, word, or question



Submit Request

- Click above to make an Open Records request
- Any request for information under the PIA is considered a public record and your request may be made public



My Records Center

- Check Status of Requests Submitted

Top Questions

Summary

- 1 [How do I request a copy of a divorce or marriage record?](#)
- 2 [What is public information?](#)
- 3 [How do I make a request?](#)
- 4 [What will the charges be?](#)
- 5 [How do I submit a Municipal Court Records Request?](#)
- 6 [How long will it take?](#)
- 7 [How will I receive my information?](#)
- 8 [What is the status of my request?](#)

Clear transparency menu puts citizens in the driver's seat when it comes to finding out information about their own city government.



Find Information

- Find answers by entering a phrase, word, or question



Submit Request

- Click above to make an Open Records request
- Any request for information under the PIA is considered a public record and your request may be made public



My Records Center

- Check Status of Requests Submitted

“Find Information” leads to an easy-to-use menu of frequently asked questions that help with figuring out commonly asked questions about the open records process.

“Submit Request” leads to a place where a citizen can create an account and file a Public Information Act request.

“My Records Center” allows citizens to check the status of existing requests.

San Antonio's Public Information Act process is clearly an best practice that all local governments with websites should strive to emulate. HB 2310 does not require an extensive framework such as San Antonio provides, but it does ensure that at least some kind of visible link so citizens have some indication of how to file a request.

