

Freedom of Information Commission

At a Glance

COLLEEN M. MURPHY, *Executive Director/General Counsel*
Mary E. Schwind, *Managing Director/Associate General Counsel*
Thomas A. Hennick, *Public Education Officer*
Established – 1975
Statutory authority – CGS Section 1-200 et. Seq.
Central office – 18-20 Trinity Street, Hartford, CT 06106
Number of employees – 15
Recurring operating expenses – \$1,692,923
Organizational structure – Commission

Mission

To ensure citizen access to the records and meetings of all public agencies in Connecticut in support of the public's right to know.

Statutory Responsibility

To ensure that all public agencies comply with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Public Service

The Commission holds hearings and renders decisions on citizen complaints alleging denial of access under the FOIA. It also conducts educational programs and prepares literature for public officials and the general public.

Improvements/Achievements 2014-2015

The Commission continued its efforts to efficiently tackle its heavy volume of contested cases, placing emphasis on its ombudsman program as it had done the previous year. In 2014, staff resolved 637, or more than 67%, of the 941 cases, without a hearing. The remaining 304, or 32%, either went to a hearing, are scheduled for a hearing or may be resolved short of a hearing.

Nonetheless, the continuing heavy proliferation of formal complaints makes accomplishing such efficiencies a formidable task. In 2014, the Commission set an all-time record with 941 formal complaints, the second year in a row the commission set a new standard for complaints. As of August 25, 2015, the Commission was on pace for more than 850 complaints for the calendar year. Prior to 2006, the highest number of complaints ever received by the Commission was 676 in 2000. The Commission now averages more than 800 formal complaints a year, with 807 in calendar year 2008, 792 in 2009, 806 in 2010, 719 in 2011, 730 in 2012, 810 in 2013 and 941 in 2014.

In other matters of interest:

- The Commission continued to expand its community outreach program aimed at the state's minority communities. Several presentations were made targeting Spanish-speaking citizens at various festivals and events. The program features Spanish-language videos and literature and is being distributed statewide.
- The Commission expanded the use of the educational video "The Government Belongs to the People" in 2015. The video offers insight into the rich history of Freedom of Information in Connecticut as well as examples of the need for open and accessible government. The video, completed in 2012, is now being shared with citizens and public officials throughout the state.
- The Commission has continued to receive a growing number of requests for speakers and workshops as part of its educational programs. The annual FOI Conference drew 148 attendees in April. The Commission has provided an average of 95 speakers a year at a variety of venues over the past 5 years. This represents an increase of 35-40 speaking engagements a year over the past 10 years. A total of 112 speaking programs were offered in 2014. Between 110 and 115 are anticipated for 2015.
- The Commission is in the process of upgrading its case management system. The upgraded system, utilizing LawBase software, will enable the Commission to more efficiently and effectively process and monitor its cases.
- The Commission remains in constant dialogue with the Legislature about all proposed legislation that could impact the people's right to know. During the regular legislative session, the Commission monitored 245 bills. A total of 107 received public hearings and FOI Commission staff prepared statements for and/or testified on 10 of those bills. The Commission spent considerable time and effort working with the Legislature toward the successful passage of Public Act 2015-164 which strengthened the public's right to access arrest record information.

Reducing Waste

The Commission is committed to regular reviews of its current operating procedures aimed at reducing waste and increasing efficiency.

Strategic Planning

- Hear and resolve cases in a timely fashion;
- Settle contested cases informally through ombudsman program;
- Defend the Commission through staff counsel in court appeals;
- Conduct workshops, provide speakers, publish Commission reports and other literature;
- Develop public policy positions with regard to issues of information accessibility, especially as they relate to such matters as emerging information technologies;
- Render declaratory rulings of general applicability under the FOIA;
- Expand and broaden community outreach program and
- Refine and expand training program for advisory board members and agency liaisons.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Commission is committed to equal employment opportunities for all.