

**RULES
OF
THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER**

**CHAPTER 0940-01-10
PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0940-01-10-.01	Purpose	0940-01-10-.08	Copies of Public Records
0940-01-10-.02	Definitions	0940-01-10-.09	Fees and Charges; Procedures for Billing and Payment; Aggregation of Frequent and Multiple Requests
0940-01-10-.03	General Information		
0940-01-10-.04	Requesting Access to Public Records		
0940-01-10-.05	Responding to Public Records Requests	0940-01-10-.10	Public Records Request Form
0940-01-10-.06	Redaction of Public Records	0940-01-10-.11	Public Records Request Response Form
0940-01-10-.07	Inspection of Public Records		

0940-01-10-.01 PURPOSE.

The purpose of these rules is to establish procedures regarding public records requests received by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and to provide economical and efficient access to public records as provided under the Tennessee Public Records Act.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.02 DEFINITIONS.

- (1) "Governmental Entity" means the State of Tennessee, or any county, municipality, city or other political subdivision of the State of Tennessee.
- (2) "Office of Open Records Counsel" or "OORC" means the office established pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 8-4-601 *et seq.*, or any successor office or entity.
- (3) "Privacy Counsel" means the General Counsel of TDMHSAS unless otherwise delegated.
- (4) "Public Records" means all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings, or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any governmental agency, not otherwise protected by law or exempt from disclosure under the TPRA.
- (5) "Public Records Request Coordinator" or "PRRC" means the individual, or individuals, designated in Rule 0940-01-10-.05 who has, or have, the responsibility to ensure public record requests are routed to the appropriate records custodian and are fulfilled in accordance with the TPRA. The PRRC may also be a records custodian.
- (6) "Records Custodian" means the office, official, or employee lawfully responsible for the direct custody and care of a public record. The records custodian is not necessarily the original preparer or receiver of the record.
- (7) "Requestor" means the citizen seeking access to a public record, whether it is for inspection or duplication.

(Rule 0940-01-10-.02, continued)

- (8) "TDMHSAS" or the "Department" means the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.
- (9) "TPRA" means the Tennessee Public Records Act found in Title 10, Chapter 7 of the Tennessee Code Annotated.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.03 GENERAL INFORMATION.

- (1) The TPRA provides that all state, county, and municipal records shall, at all times during business hours, which for public hospitals shall be during the business hours of their administrative offices, be open for personal inspection by any citizen of this state, and those in charge of the records shall not refuse such right of inspection to any citizen, unless otherwise provided by state or federal rule or law. Accordingly, the public records of TDMHSAS are presumed to be open for inspection unless otherwise provided by law.
- (2) Personnel of TDMHSAS shall timely and efficiently provide access and assistance to persons requesting to view or receive copies of public records. No provision of this Rule shall be used to hinder access to open public records. However, the integrity and organization of public records, as well as the efficient and safe operation of TDMHSAS, shall be protected as provided by current law. Concerns about this Rule should be addressed to the PRRC for TDMHSAS.
- (3) This Rule shall be applied consistently throughout the various offices and divisions of TDMHSAS.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.04 REQUESTING ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS.

- (1) Public records requests shall be made to the PRRC in order to ensure public records requests are routed to the appropriate records custodian and fulfilled in a timely manner. Any employee of TDMHSAS who receives what they believe may be a public records request, formal or informal, shall immediately notify the PRRC.
- (2) Requests for inspection are not required to be made in writing. The PRRC shall request a mailing or email address from the requestor for providing any written communication required under the TPRA.
- (3) Requests for inspection may be made orally or in writing using the Public Records Request Form at Andrew Jackson Building, 6th Floor, 500 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37243, by phone at 615-532-6500, or by email at oc.tdmhsas@tn.gov.
- (4) Requests for copies, or requests for inspection and copies, of public records shall be made in writing. Requestors may use the Public Records Request Form found in Rule 0940-01-10-.01 or any other written form of communication such as mail or electronic mail.
- (5) Proof of Tennessee citizenship by presentation of a valid Tennessee driver's license, or alternative acceptable form of identification, may be required as a condition to inspect or receive copies of public records.

(Rule 0940-01-10-.04, continued)

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019. Amendments filed October 16, 2024; effective January 14, 2025.

0940-01-10-.05 RESPONDING TO PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS.

- (1) The PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall review public records requests and make an initial determination of the following:
 - (a) If the requestor provided evidence of Tennessee citizenship, if required, pursuant to Rule 0940-01-10-.04;
 - (b) If the records requested are described with sufficient specificity to identify them;
 - (c) If TDMHSAS has custody of the requested records and, if so, the name of the respective records custodian; and
 - (d) If the records requested, or any of their contents, are protected by privacy laws or are in any way confidential or privileged under federal and/or state law and whether the Privacy Counsel needs to be consulted.
- (2) The PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall acknowledge receipt of the request and take any of the following appropriate actions:
 - (a) Advise the requestor of this Rule and the elections made regarding:
 1. Proof of Tennessee citizenship pursuant to Rule 0940-01-10-.04;
 2. Any forms required for copies;
 3. Fees, labor threshold, and waivers, if applicable; and
 4. Aggregation of multiple or frequent requests.
 - (b) If appropriate, deny the request in writing and provide the reason for the denial, which may include but is not limited to any of the following:
 1. The requestor is not, or has not presented evidence of being, a Tennessee citizen pursuant to Rule 0940-01-10-.04.
 2. The request lacks specificity.
 3. An exemption makes the record not subject to disclosure under the TPRA.
 4. TDMHSAS is not the custodian of the requested records.
 5. The records do not exist.
 6. Any other legal grounds for denial.
 - (c) If appropriate, contact the requestor to see if the request can be narrowed.
 - (d) Forward the request to the appropriate records custodian in TDMHSAS.
 - (e) If requested records are in the custody of a different governmental entity, and the PRRC knows the correct governmental entity to which the public records request

(Rule 0940-01-10-.05, continued)

should be made, the PRRC will advise the requestor of the correct governmental entity and the PRRC for that entity, if known.

- (3) The designated PRRC is the Director of Communications of TDMHSAS; provided, however, that responsibilities of the PRRC under this Rule may be delegated to one or more employees under the direction of the PRRC. The PRRC may be contacted at:

TDMHSAS Director of Communications
Andrew Jackson Building, 6th Floor
500 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37243
Telephone: (615) 532-6500
Email: oc.tdmhsas@tn.gov

- (4) Upon receiving a public records request, the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall promptly make requested public records available in accordance with T.C.A. § 10-7-503. If the PRRC is uncertain as to whether an applicable exemption applies or whether the records requested, or any of their contents, are protected by privacy laws or are in any way confidential or privileged under federal and/or state law, the PRRC will consult with the Privacy Counsel in the Division of General Counsel. The PRRC may also consult with the OORC after first consulting with the Privacy Counsel.
- (5) If it is not practicable to promptly provide requested records because additional time is necessary to determine whether the requested records exist; to search for, retrieve, or otherwise gain access to records; to determine whether the records are open; to redact records; or for other similar reasons, then the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall, within seven (7) business days from the PRRC's receipt of the request, send the requestor a completed Public Records Request Response Form.
- (6) If the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, denies a public records request, he or she shall deny the request in writing as provided in Rule 0940-01-10-.05(2)(b) using the Public Records Request Response Form.
- (7) If the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, reasonably determines production of records should be segmented because the records request is for a large volume of records, or additional time is necessary to prepare the records for access, the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall use the Public Records Request Response Form to notify the requestor that production of the records will be in segments and that a records production schedule will be provided as expeditiously as practicable. If appropriate, the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, should contact the requestor to see if the request can be narrowed.
- (8) If the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, discovers records responsive to a records request were omitted from a response, then the PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, should contact the requestor to inform him/her of the omission. The PRRC, or an employee under the direction of the PRRC, shall ascertain whether the requestor wants to inspect and/or copy the previously omitted records. Any such request shall be subject to the provisions of this Rule regarding inspection and copies of public records, and fees and charges.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019. Amendments filed October 16, 2024; effective January 14, 2025.

0940-01-10-.06 REDACTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS.

- (1) If a record contains confidential information or information that is not open for public inspection, the PRRC will consult with the Privacy Counsel or other appropriate parties regarding potential redaction of records. The PRRC may also consult with the OORC or with the Office of Attorney General and Reporter after first consulting with the Privacy Counsel.
- (2) TDMHSAS will make best efforts to remove any and all information it deems confidential or otherwise protected from disclosure pursuant to any state and/or federal law, rule, or regulation before disclosing the information in response to a public records request.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.07 INSPECTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS.

- (1) There shall be no charge for inspection of open public records.
- (2) The location for inspection of records within the offices of TDMHSAS shall be determined by the PRRC.
- (3) Under reasonable circumstances, the PRRC or a records custodian may require an appointment for inspection or may require inspection of records at an alternate location.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.08 COPIES OF PUBLIC RECORDS.

- (1) The PRRC shall promptly respond to a public records request for copies in the most economic and efficient manner practicable, to include providing digital copies.
- (2) Copies will be available for pickup at a location specified by the PRRC.
- (3) Upon payment for postage or delivery charges, copies will be delivered to the address provided by the requestor.
- (4) If the requestor requests digital copies, digital copies will be delivered via email to an email address designated by the requestor.
- (5) A requestor may use a personal camera or cell phone to take a photograph of a public record, so long as the integrity of the record is maintained. If a record contains confidential information or information that is not open for public inspection, the record may not be photographed until all appropriate redactions are completed.
- (6) TDMHSAS, or its contractors or agents, shall maintain custody of its records at all times. A requestor shall not be allowed to take custody of any TDMHSAS record.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

0940-01-10-.09 FEES AND CHARGES; PROCEDURES FOR BILLING AND PAYMENT; AGGREGATION OF FREQUENT AND MULTIPLE REQUESTS.

- (1) The PRRC shall provide requestors with an itemized estimate of the charges prior to producing copies of records and may require pre-payment of such charges before producing requested records.
- (2) When fees for copies and labor do not exceed \$50, the fees may be waived by the PRRC. Requests for waivers for fees above \$50 must be presented to the PRRC, who is authorized to determine if such waiver is in the best interest of TDMHSAS and for the public good. Fees associated with aggregated records requests will not be waived.
- (3) Fees and charges for copies are as follows:
 - (a) \$0.15 per page for letter and legal-sized black and white copies.
 - (b) \$0.50 per page for letter and legal-sized color copies.
 - (c) Labor when time exceeds one (1) hour.
 - (d) If an outside vendor is used, the actual costs assessed by the vendor.
- (4) Fees for labor and actual costs will be assessed in accordance with the OORC's Schedule of Reasonable Charges.
- (5) Payment of fees and charges for copies is to be made by personal check payable to "TDMHSAS Fiscal Services" presented to TDMHSAS Fiscal Services, Andrew Jackson Building, 6th Floor, 500 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37243.
- (6) Payment in advance will be required when costs are estimated to exceed \$50.
- (7) Aggregation of Frequent and Multiple Requests:
 - (a) TDMHSAS will aggregate records requests in accordance with the Frequent and Multiple Request Policy promulgated by the OORC when more than four (4) requests are received within a calendar month either from a single individual or a group of individuals deemed to be working in concert.
 - (b) The level at which records requests will be aggregated is departmental.
 - (c) The PRRC is responsible for making the determination that a group of individuals are working in concert. As soon as practicable after such a determination is made, the PRRC shall inform the individuals in writing that they have been deemed to be working in concert and that they have the right to appeal the decision to the OORC.

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

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0940-01-10-.10 PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST FORM.**PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST FORM**

The Tennessee Public Records Act (TPRA) grants Tennessee citizens the right to access open public records that exist at the time of the request. The TPRA does not require records custodians to compile information or create or recreate records that do not exist.

To: [Insert Governmental Entity Name and Name and Contact Information for the Public Records Request Coordinator]

From: [Insert Requestor's Name and Contact Information (include an address for any TPRA required written response)]

Is the requestor a Tennessee citizen? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Request: ☐ Inspection (The TPRA does not permit fees or require a written request for inspection onlyⁱ.)

☐ Copy/Duplicate

If costs for copies are assessed, the requestor has a right to receive an estimate. Do you wish to waive your right to an estimate and agree to pay copying and duplication costs in an amount not to exceed \$_____?
If so, initial here_____.

Delivery preference: ☐ On-Site Pick-Up
☐ Electronic

☐ USPS First-Class Mail
☐ Other: _____

RECORDS REQUESTED:

Provide a detailed description of the record(s) requested, including: (1) type of record; (2) timeframe or dates for the records sought; and (3) subject matter or key words related to the records. Under the TPRA, record requests must be sufficiently detailed to enable a governmental entity to identify the specific records sought. As such, your record request must provide enough detail to enable the records custodian responding to the request to identify the specific records you are seeking.

Signature of Requestor and Date Submitted

Signature of Public Records Coordinator and Date Received

ⁱ Note, Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-504(a)(20)(C) permits charging for redaction of private records of a utility.

(Rule 0940-01-10-.10, continued)

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.

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0940-01-10-.11 PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST RESPONSE FORM.

PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST RESPONSE FORM
TN Department of Mental Health and
Substance Abuse Services

[Date]

[Requestor's Name and Contact Information]:

In response to your records request received on [Date Request Received], our office is taking the action(s)¹ indicated below:

- ☐ The public record(s) responsive to your request will be made available for inspection:

Location: _____

Date & Time: _____

- ☐ Copies of public record(s) responsive to your request are:

☐ Attached;

☐ Available for pickup at the following location:

_____ ; or

- ☐ Being delivered via: ☐ USPS First-Class Mail ☐ Electronically ☐ Other: _____

- ☐ Your request is denied on the following grounds:

☐ Your request was not sufficiently detailed to enable identification of the specific requested record(s). You need to provide additional information to identify the requested record(s).

☐ No such record(s) exists or this office does not maintain record(s) responsive to your request.

☐ No proof of Tennessee citizenship was presented with your request. Your request will be reconsidered upon presentation of an adequate form of identification.

☐ You are not a Tennessee citizen.

☐ You have not paid the estimated copying/production fees.

☐ The following state, federal, or other applicable law prohibits disclosure of the requested records:

_____.

- ☐ It is not practicable for the records you requested to be made promptly available for inspection and/or copying because:

☐ It has not yet been determined that records responsive to your request exist; or

☐ This office is still in the process of retrieving, reviewing, and/or redacting the requested records.

The time reasonably necessary to produce the record(s) or information and/or to make a determination of a proper response to your request is: _____.

If you have any additional questions regarding your record request, please contact [Records Custodian or Public Records Request Coordinator].

Sincerely,

[Records Custodian or Public Record Request Coordinator] [Name, Title, and Contact Information]

¹ If all requested records do not have the same response, so indicate.

(Rule 0940-01-10-.11, continued)

Authority: T.C.A. §§ 10-7-503, 33-1-302, 33-1-303, 33-1-305, and 33-1-309. **Administrative History:** Original rule filed October 5, 2018; effective January 3, 2019.