



**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
ACT PROCEDURES &
GUIDELINES**

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RTA

**REGIONAL
TRANSIT AUTHORITY**
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY FOR SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN (RTA)

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES

Introduction

The RTA's policy with respect to FOIA requests is to comply with State law in all respects and to respond to FOIA requests in a consistent, fair, and even-handed manner.

The RTA acknowledges that it has a legal obligation to disclose all nonexempt public records in its possession pursuant to a FOIA request. The RTA acknowledges that sometimes it is necessary to invoke the exemptions identified under FOIA in order to ensure the effective operation of government and to protect the privacy of individuals.

The RTA will protect the public's interest in disclosure, while balancing the requirement to withhold or redact portions of certain records. The RTA's policy is to disclose public records consistent with and in compliance with State law.

Section 1: General Policies

The RTA, acting pursuant to MCL 15.236 designates its Communications Officer as the FOIA Coordinator. He or she is authorized designate other RTA staff to act on his or her behalf to accept and process written requests for the RTA's public records and approve denials.

If a request for a public record is received by facsimile or e-mail, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. If a request is sent by e-mail and delivered to a RTA spam or junk-mail folder, the request is not deemed received until one day after the FOIA Coordinator first becomes aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall note in the FOIA log both the date the request was delivered to the spam or junk-mail folder and the date the FOIA Coordinator became aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall review RTA spam and junk-mail folders on a regular basis, which shall be no less than once a month.

The RTA is not obligated to create a new public record or make a compilation or summary of information which does not already exist. Neither the FOIA Coordinator nor other RTA staff are obligated to provide answers to questions contained in requests for public records or regarding the content of the records themselves.

The FOIA Coordinator shall keep a copy of all written requests for public records received by the RTA on file for a period of at least one year.

Section 2: Calculation of Fees

A fee will not be charged for the cost of search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would

result in unreasonably high costs to the RTA because of the nature of the request in the particular instance, and the RTA specifically identifies the nature of the unreasonably high costs.

The following factors shall be used to determine an unreasonably high cost to the RTA:

- The particular request incurs costs greater than incurred from the typical or usual request received by the RTA. *See Bloch v Davison Community Schools, 2011 Mich App Lexis 771, 2011 WL 1564645*
- Volume of the public record requested
- Amount of time spent to search for, examine, review and separate exempt from non-exempt information in the record requested.
- Whether public records from more than one RTA department or various RTA offices is necessary to respond to the request.
- The available staffing to respond to the request.
- Any other similar factors identified by the FOIA Coordinator in responding to the particular request.

The RTA may charge for the following costs associated with processing a FOIA request:

- Labor costs directly associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record.
- Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure of information which is disclosed.
- The actual cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media.
- The cost of duplication of publication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records.
- The cost of labor associated with duplication or publication, including making paper copies, making digital copies or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet or other electronic means.
- The actual cost of mailing or sending a public record.

Labor costs will be calculated based on the following requirements:

- All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15 minute increments with all partial time increments rounded down. The cost of labor directly associated with duplication, publication or transferring records to nonpaper physical media can be charged in time increments of the RTA's choosing with all partial increments rounded down.

- Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid RTA employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work. If the RTA uses contract or outside labor to separate and delete exempt material from non-exempt material, it will clearly note the name of person or firm who does the work and the total labor cost may not exceed an amount 6 times the state minimum hourly wage, which is currently \$8.15.
- Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits. The RTA may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.
 - Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs until agreed to by the requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.

The cost to provide records on non-paper physical media when so requested will be based on the following requirements:

- Computer disks, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
- This cost will only be assessed if the RTA has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.
- In order to ensure the integrity and security of the RTA's technological infrastructure, the RTA will procure any requested non-paper media and will not accept non-paper media from the requestor

The cost to provide paper copies of records will be based on the following requirements:

- Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper. Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.
- The RTA may provide records using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.

The cost to mail records to a requester will be based on the following requirements:

- The actual cost to mail public records using a reasonably economical and justified means.
- The RTA may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless requested.

If the FOIA Coordinator does not respond to a written request in a timely manner, the following shall be required:

- Reduce the labor costs by 5% for each day the RTA exceeds the time permitted under FOIA up to a 50% maximum reduction, if any of the following applies:
 - The late response was willful and intentional.
 - The written request, within the first 250 words of the body of a letter facsimile, e-mail or e-mail attachment conveyed a request for information.
 - The written request included the words, characters, or abbreviations for “freedom of information”, “information”, “and FOIA”, “copy” or a recognizable misspelling of such, or legal code reference to MCL 15. 231 et seq or 1976 Public Act 442 on the front of an envelope or in the subject line of an e-mail, letter or facsimile cover page.

Fully note the charge reduction in the Detailed Itemization of Costs Form

Section 3: Requesting a Public Record

A person requesting to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by RTA must do so in writing. The request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable RTA personnel to identify and find the requested public record.

No specific form to submit a request for a public record is required. However the FOIA Coordinator may make available a FOIA Request Form for use by the public.

Written requests for public records may be submitted in person or by mail to the RTA office. Requests may also be submitted electronically by facsimile and e-mail. Upon their receipt, requests for public records shall be promptly forwarded to the FOIA Coordinator for processing.

A person may request that public records be provided on non-paper physical media, electronically mailed or other otherwise provided to him or her in lieu of paper copies. The RTA will comply with the request only if it possesses the necessary technological capability to provide records in the requested non-paper physical media format.

A person may subscribe to future issues of public records that are created, issued or disseminated by the RTA on a regular basis. A subscription is valid for up to 6 months and may be renewed by the subscriber.

A person who makes a verbal, non-written request for information believed to be available on the RTA’s website, where practicable and to the best ability of the employee receiving the request, shall be informed of the pertinent website address.

A person serving a sentence of imprisonment in a local, state or federal correctional facility is not entitled to submit a request for a public record. The FOIA Coordinator will deny all such requests.

Section 4: Processing a Request

Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the person making the request, within 5 business days of receipt of a FOIA request the RTA will issue a response. If a request is received by facsimile, e-mail or other electronic transmission, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The RTA will respond to the request in one of the following ways:

- Grant the request.
- Issue a written notice denying the request.
- Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request.
- Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the RTA needs an additional 10 business days to respond. Only one such extension is permitted.
- Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the RTA's website.

If the request is granted, or granted in part, the FOIA Coordinator will require that payment be made in full for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available. The FOIA Coordinator shall provide a detailed itemization of the allowable costs incurred to process the request to the person making the request. A copy of these Procedures and Guidelines shall be provided to the requestor with the response to a written request for public records, provided however, that if these Procedures and Guidelines, and its Written Public Summary are maintained on the RTA's website, then a website link to those documents may be provided in lieu of providing paper copies.

If the cost of processing a FOIA request is \$50 or less, the requester will be notified of the amount due and where the documents can be obtained.

If based on a good faith calculation by the RTA, the cost of processing a FOIA request is expected to exceed \$50, or if the requester has not fully paid for a previously granted request, the RTA will require a good-faith deposit before processing the request. In making the request for a good-faith deposit the FOIA Coordinator shall provide the requester with a detailed itemization of the allowable costs estimated to be incurred by the RTA to process the request and also provide a best efforts estimate of a time frame it will take the RTA to provide the records to the requester. The best efforts estimate shall be nonbinding on the RTA, but will be made in good faith and will strive to be reasonably accurate, given the nature of the request in the particular instance, so as to

provide the requested records in a manner based on the public policy expressed by Section 1 of the FOIA.

If the request is denied or denied in part, the FOIA Coordinator will issue a Notice of Denial which shall provide in the applicable circumstance:

- An explanation as to why a requested public record is exempt from disclosure; or
- A certificate that the requested record does not exist under the name or description provided by the requestor, or another name reasonably known by the RTA; or
- An explanation or description of the public record or information within a public record that is separated or deleted from the public record; and
- An explanation of the person's right to submit an appeal of the denial to either the RTA Board or seek judicial review in the Wayne County Circuit Court, or in the circuit court in the county in which the public record or RTA office is located,
- An explanation of the right to receive attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements as well actual or compensatory damages, and punitive damages of \$1,000, should they prevail in Circuit Court.
- The Notice of Denial shall be signed by the FOIA Coordinator.

If a request does not sufficiently describe a public record, the FOIA Coordinator may, in lieu of issuing a Notice of Denial indicating that the request is deficient, seek clarification or amendment of the request by the person making the request. Any clarification or amendment will be considered a new request subject to the timelines described in this Section.

The RTA shall provide reasonable facilities and opportunities for persons to examine and inspect public records during normal business hours. The FOIA Coordinator is authorized to promulgate rules regulating the manner in which records may be viewed so as to protect RTA records from loss, alteration, mutilation or destruction and to prevent excessive interference with normal RTA operations.

The FOIA Coordinator shall, upon written request, furnish a certified copy of a public record at no additional cost to the person requesting the public record.

Section 5: Fee Deposits

If the fee estimate is expected to exceed \$50.00 based on a good-faith calculation by the RTA, the requestor will be asked to provide a deposit not exceeding on-half of the total estimated fee.

If a request for public records is from a person who has not fully paid the RTA for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the FOIA

Coordinator will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before beginning to search for a public record for any subsequent written request by that person when all of the following conditions exist:

- the final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
- the public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the RTA's possession;
- the public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the time frame estimated by the RTA to provide the records;
- 90 days have passed since the FOIA Coordinator notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
- the individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the RTA; and
- the FOIA Coordinator has calculated a detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased estimated fee deposit.

The FOIA Coordinator will not require an increased estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:

- the person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the RTA;
- the RTA is subsequently paid in full for the applicable prior written request; or
- 365 days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the RTA.

Section 6: Waiver of Fees

The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole judgment of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduced fee is in the public interest because such can be considered as primarily benefitting the general public.

The FOIA Coordinator will waive the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request if the person requesting a public record submits an affidavit stating that they are:

- indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
- if not receiving public assistance stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigency.

An individual is not eligible to receive the waiver if:

- the requester has previously received discounted copies of public records from the RTA twice during the calendar year; or
- the requester requests information in connection with other parties who are offering or providing payment or other remuneration to the individual to make the request.

An affidavit is sworn statement. The FOIA Coordinator may make a Fee Waiver Affidavit Form available for use by the public.

The FOIA Coordinator will waive the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request if the person requesting a public record is a nonprofit organization designated by the State to carry out activities under subtitle C of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 200 and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act, or their successors, if the request meets all of the following requirements:

- is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients;
- is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under Section 931 of the Mental Health Code, MCL 330.1931;
- is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the State.

Section 7: Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record

When a requester believes that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, he or she may file an appeal of the denial with the RTA Board. The RTA Board will not be considered to have received a written appeal of a denial until its first regularly scheduled meeting following the submission of the appeal. It then has 10 business days to respond to the appeal. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify the reason or reasons the requester is seeking a reversal of the denial.

Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the RTA Board will respond in writing by:

- reversing the disclosure denial;
- upholding the disclosure denial; or
- reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.
- Under unusual circumstances, such as the need to examine or review a voluminous amount of separate and distinct public records or the need to collect the requested records from numerous facilities located apart from the office receiving or

processing the request, the Board may issue not more than 1 notice of extension for not more than 10 business days to respond to the appeal

Whether or not a requestor submitted an appeal of a denial to the RTA Board, he or she may file a civil action in Wayne County Circuit Court or in the circuit court in the county in which the public record or RTA office is located, within 180 days after the RTA's final determination to deny the request.

If the court determines that the public record is not exempt from disclosure, the court will award the appellant reasonable attorneys' fees, cost and disbursements. If the court determines that the appellant prevails only in part, the court in its discretion may award all or an appropriate portion of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements.

If the court determines that the RTA arbitrarily and capriciously violated the FOIA by refusing or delaying the disclosure of copies of a public record, it shall award the appellant punitive damages in the \$1,000 and shall also order that the public body pay a civil fine of \$1000 to the general fund of the State treasury.

Section 8: Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee

If a requestor believes that the fee charged by the RTA to process a FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, he or she must first submit a written appeal for a fee reduction to the RTA Board. The RTA Board will not be considered to have received a written appeal of a fee amount until its first regularly scheduled meeting following the submission of the appeal. It then has 10 business days to respond to the appeal. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted.

Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the RTA Board will respond in writing by:

- waiving the fee;
- reducing the fee and issuing a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee, accompanied by a certification by the Board that the statements in the determination are accurate and the reduced fee amount complies with these Procedures and Guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA;
- upholding the fee and issuing a written determination indicating the specific basis under Section 4 of the FOIA that supports the required fee, accompanied by a certification by the RTA Board that the statements in the determination are accurate and the fee amount

complies with these Procedures and Guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA; or

- issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the RTA Board will respond to the written appeal.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the RTA's determination of a fee appeal, a requestor may commence a civil action in Wayne County Circuit Court or in the circuit court in the county in which the public record or RTA office is located, for a fee reduction. If a civil action is filed appealing the fee, the RTA is not obligated to process the request for the public record until the Court resolves the fee dispute.

If the court determines that the RTA required a fee that exceeds the amount permitted, it shall reduce the fee to a permissible amount. If the appellant in the civil action prevails by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the court may award all or appropriate amount of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements.

If the court determines that RTA has acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, the court shall also award the appellant punitive damages in the amount of \$500, and shall also the payment of a civil fine in the amount of \$500.

Section 9: Penalty for Violation of the Act

If the court determines in either an appeal of a denial of a public record, or the appeal of an excessive fee, that the public body willfully and intentionally failed to comply with the FOIA or otherwise acted in bad faith, then in addition to any another award or sanction, the court shall impose a civil fine of not less than \$2500 or more than \$7500 for each occurrence.

The court is required to consider the budget of the public body and whether the public body has been previously been assessed penalties for violations of the FOIA.

The civil fine is to be deposited to the general fund of the State treasury.

Section 10: Conflict with Prior FOIA Policies and Procedures; Effective Date

To the extent that these Procedures and Guidelines conflict with previous FOIA policies promulgated by RTA these Procedures and Guidelines are controlling.

To the extent that any provision of these Procedures and Guidelines, or any administrative rules, practices or forms promulgated by the FOIA Coordinator, pertaining to the release of public records is found to be in conflict with any State statute,

the applicable statute shall control. Further, the FOIA Coordinator shall process all FOIA requests consistent with State law, notwithstanding any provision contained herein.

These FOIA Policies and Guidelines become effective July 1, 2015.

Section 11: Appendix of RTA Forms

- FOIA Request Form
- FOIA Fee Itemization Form
- Affidavit of Indigency

REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN (RTA) WRITTEN PUBLIC SUMMARY OF FOIA PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Consistent with Public Act 563 of 2014 amending the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the following is the Written Public Summary of the RTA's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines.

1. How do I submit a FOIA request to the RTA?

- Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the RTA must be submitted in writing.
 - A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable the RTA to find it.
 - No specific form to submit a written request is required. However a FOIA Request form for your use and convenience is available on the RTA's website at www.rtamichigan.org
 - Written requests can be made in person by delivery to any RTA office in person or by mail.
 - A request may also be submitted by e-mail. To ensure a prompt response, e-mail requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the subject line and be sent to info@rtamichigan.org.
2. A request may also be submitted by facsimile. To ensure a prompt response, facsimile requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the cover sheet and be sent to the attention of the RTA FOIA Coordinator, at (313) 961-4869.

Note: If you are serving a sentence or imprisonment in a local, state or federal correctional facility, you are not entitled to submit a request for a public record.

2. What kind of responses can I expect to my request?

- Within 5 business days of receipt of a FOIA request, the RTA will issue a response. If a request is received by facsimile or e-mail, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The RTA will respond to your request in one of the following ways:
 - Grant the request.
 - Issue a written notice denying the request.
 - Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request.
 - Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the RTA needs an additional 10 business days to respond.
 - Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the RTA's website.
- If the request is granted, or granted in part, the RTA will ask that payment be made for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available. If the cost of processing the request is expected to exceed \$50, or if you have not paid for a previously granted request, the RTA will require a deposit before processing the payment.

3. What are the RTA's fee deposit requirements?

- If the RTA has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request exceeds \$50.00, the RTA will require that you provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When the RTA requests the deposit it will provide you a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request following receipt by the RTA of your deposit.
- If the RTA receives a request from a person who has not paid the RTA for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the RTA will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before it begins to search for the public record for any subsequent written request when all of the following conditions exist:
 - the final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
 - the public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the RTA's possession;
 - the public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the time frame estimated by the RTA to provide the records;
 - 90 days have passed since the RTA notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
 - the individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the RTA; and
 - the RTA has calculated an estimated detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.
- The RTA will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:
 - the person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the RTA;
 - the RTA is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
 - 365 days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the RTA.

4. How does the RTA calculate FOIA processing fees?

- A fee will not be charged for the cost of search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the RTA because of the nature of the request in the particular instance, and the RTA specifically identifies the nature of the unreasonably high costs.

- The Michigan FOIA statute permits the RTA to assess and collect a fee for six designated processing components. The RTA may charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:
 - Labor costs associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record.
 - Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure of information which is disclosed.
 - The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the requester asks for records on non-paper physical media.
 - The cost of duplication or publication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records.
 - Labor costs associated with duplication or publication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
 - The cost to mail or send a public record to a requestor.
- Labor Costs
 - All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15 minute increments with all partial time increments rounded down.
 - Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid RTA employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.
 - Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits.
- Non-Paper Physical Media
 - The cost for records provided on non-paper physical media, such as computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
 - This cost will only be assessed if the RTA has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.
- Paper Copies
 - Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper. Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.
 - The RTA may provide records using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.
- Mailing Costs
 - The cost to mail public records will use a reasonably economical and justified means.
 - The RTA may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.

- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless requested.

5. How do I qualify for a reduction of the processing fees?

- The RTA may waive or reduce the fee associated with a request when RTA determines that to do so is in the public interest because release of the information is considered as primarily benefitting the general public.
- The RTA will waive the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request if you submit an affidavit stating that you are:
 - indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
 - if not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigency.
- You are not eligible to receive the \$20.00 waiver if you:
 - have previously received discounted copies of public records from the RTA twice during the calendar year; or
 - are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to you to make the request.
- An affidavit is a sworn statement. For your convenience, the RTA has provided an Affidavit of Indigency form for the waiver of FOIA fees on its website.
- The RTA will waive the fee for a nonprofit organization which meets all of the following conditions:
 - the organization is designated by the State under federal law to carry out activities under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act;
 - the request is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients;
 - the request is made for a reason wholly consistent with the provisions of federal law under Section 931 of the Mental Health Code; and
 - the request is accompanied by documentation of the organization's designation by the State.

6. How may I challenge the denial of a public record or an excessive fee?

- Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record
If you believe that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, you may file an appeal of the denial with the RTA Board. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify the reason or reasons you are seeking a reversal of the denial. The RTA Board will not be considered to have received a written appeal of a denial until its first regularly scheduled meeting following the submission of the appeal.

Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal, the RTA Board will respond in writing by:

- reversing the disclosure denial;
- upholding the disclosure denial; or
- reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.

Whether or not you submitted an appeal of a denial to the RTA Board, you may file a civil action in Wayne County Circuit Court, or in the circuit court in the county in which the public record or RTA office is located, within 180 days after the RTA's final determination to deny your request. Should you prevail in the civil action, the court will award you reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the court determines that the RTA acted arbitrarily and capriciously in refusing to disclose or provide a public record, the court shall award you damages in the amount of \$1,000.00.

- Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee

If you believe that the fee charged by the RTA to process your FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, you must first submit a written appeal for a fee reduction to the RTA Board. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the requested fee exceeds the amount permitted. The RTA Board will not be considered to have received a written appeal of a fee amount until its first regularly scheduled meeting following the submission of the appeal.

Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the RTA Board will respond in writing by:

- waiving the fee;
- reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee;
- upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
- issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the RTA will respond to the written appeal.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the RTA Board's determination of the processing fee appeal, you may commence a civil action in Wayne County Circuit Court, or in the circuit court in the county in which the public record or RTA office is located, for a fee reduction. If you prevail in the civil action by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the court may award all or an appropriate amount of reasonably attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the court determines that the RTA acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, the court may also award you punitive damages in the amount of \$500.00.

Need more details or information?

This is only a summary of the RTA's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines. For more details and information, copies of the RTA's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines are available at no charge at the RTA office and on the RTA's website, www.rtamichigan.org.

Records Located on Website

If the RTA directly or indirectly administers or maintains an official internet presence, any public records available to the general public on that internet site at the time the request is made are exempt from any labor charges to redact (*separate exempt information from non-exempt information*).

If the FOIA coordinator knows or has reason to know that all or a portion of the requested information is available on its website, the RTA must notify the requestor in its written response that all or a portion of the requested information is available on its website. The written response, to the degree practicable in the specific instance, must include a specific webpage address where the requested information is available. On the detailed cost itemization form, the RTA must separate the requested public records that are available on its website from those that are not available on the website and must inform the requestor of the additional charge to receive copies of the public records that are available on its website.

If the RTA has included the website address for a record in its written response to the requestor and the requestor thereafter stipulates that the public record be provided to him or her in a paper format or other form, including digital media, the RTA must provide the public records in the specified format (if the RTA has the technological capability), fees not to exceed the actual costs of providing the information in the specified format.

Request for Copies/Duplication of Records on RTA Website

I hereby stipulate that, even if some or all of the records are located on a RTA website, I am requesting that the RTA make copies of those records on the website and deliver them to me in the format I have requested above. I understand that some FOIA fees may apply.

Requestor's Signature

Date

Request for Discount: Indigence

A public record search **must** be made and a copy of a public record **must** be furnished **without charge for the first \$20.00 of the fee** for each request by an individual who is entitled to information under this act and who:

- 1) Submits an affidavit stating that the individual is indigent and receiving specific public assistance, **OR**
- 2) If not receiving public assistance, stating facts showing inability to pay the cost because of indigence.

If a requestor is ineligible for the discount, the public body shall inform the requestor specifically of the reason for ineligibility in the public body's written response. An individual is ineligible for this fee reduction if **ANY** of the following apply:

- (i) The individual has previously received discounted copies of public records from the same public body twice during that calendar year,
- (ii) The individual requests the information in conjunction with outside parties who are offering or providing payment or other remuneration to the individual to make the request. A public body may require a statement by the requestor in the affidavit that the request is not being made in conjunction with outside parties in exchange for payment or other remuneration.

Office Use: Affidavit Received Eligible for Discount Ineligible for Discount

I am submitting an affidavit and requesting that I receive the discount for indigence for this FOIA request:

Date:

Requestor's Signature:

Request for Discount: Nonprofit Organization

A public record search **must** be made and a copy of a public record **must** be furnished **without charge for the first \$20.00 of the fee** for each request by a nonprofit organization formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act, if the request meets **ALL** of the following requirements:

- (i) Is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients.
- (ii) Is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the Mental Health Code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931.
- (iii) Is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the RTA.

Office Use: Documentation of State Designation Received Eligible for Discount Ineligible for Discount

I stipulate that I am a designated agent for the nonprofit organization making this FOIA request and that this request is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients and is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the Mental Health Code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931:

Date:

Requestor's Signature:

Regional Transit Authority for Southeast Michigan
1001 Woodward Ave, Suite 1400, Detroit, MI 48226
Phone- 313-402-1020 Fax- 313-961-4869
info@rtamichigan.org / www.rtamichigan.org
FOIA Fee Itemization Form

(Effective July 1, 2015)

Component	Cost Calculations	Total
1. Labor Costs – Search, Location ,and Examination of Records*	<p>Enter the hourly wage of lowest paid employee capable of performing the search, location and examination <div style="text-align: right;">\$_____ per hour</div></p> <p>Multiply the wage by the fringe benefit multiplier (maximum of 50% of the hourly wage); OR, if the requested information is available online and the requestor request the documents to be provided in another format, the fringe benefit multiplier may exceed 50% (not to exceed actual cost) <div style="text-align: right;">_____ %</div></p> <p>Multiply the hourly wage times the fringe benefit multiplier <div style="text-align: right;">\$_____ x 1.____ = \$_____</div></p> <p>If stipulated by the requestor, add the hourly overtime wage increment (but do not include in the calculation of fringe benefit costs) <div style="text-align: right;">\$_____ + _____ = \$_____</div></p> <p>Divide the resulting hourly wage by four (4) to determine the charge per fifteen (15) minute increment <div style="text-align: right;">\$_____ / 4 = \$_____</div></p>	
	<p>Number of 15 minute increments (partial time increments must be rounded down) multiplied by the permitted rate <div style="text-align: right;">_____ x \$_____ = \$_____</div></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">\$_____</p>
2. Employee Labor Costs – Redaction*	<p>If performed by the public body’s employee:</p> <p>Enter the hourly wage of lowest paid employee capable of performing the redaction <div style="text-align: right;">\$_____ per hour</div></p> <p>Multiply the wage by the fringe benefit multiplier (maximum of 50% of the hourly wage); OR, if the requested information is available online and the requestor request the documents to</p>	

	<p>be provided in another format, the fringe benefit multiplier may exceed 50% (not to exceed actual cost)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">_____ %</p> <p>Multiply the hourly wage times the fringe benefit multiplier</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$ _____ x 1. _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>If stipulated by the requestor, add the hourly overtime wage increment (but do not include in the calculation of fringe benefit costs)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$ _____ + _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>Divide the resulting hourly wage by four (4) to determine the charge per fifteen (15) minute increment</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$ _____ / 4 = \$ _____</p>	
	<p>Number of 15 minute increments (partial time increments must be rounded down) multiplied by the permitted rate</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ x \$ _____ = \$ _____</p>	<p>\$ _____</p>
<p>2. Contracted Labor Costs – Redaction*</p>	<p>If performed by Contracted Labor (Only permitted if the public body does not employ a person capable of redacting the records as determined by the FOIA Coordinator):</p> <p>Name of person or firm contracted:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Enter the hourly rate charged by the contractor (may not exceed six (6) times the State minimum wage (i.e. \$8.15x6=\$48.90)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$ _____ per hour</p> <p>Divide the hourly rate by four (4) to determine the charge per fifteen (15) minute increment</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$ _____ / 4 = \$ _____</p>	
	<p>Number of 15 minute increments (partial time increments must be rounded down) multiplied by the permitted rate</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ x \$ _____ = \$ _____</p>	<p>\$ _____</p>
<p>3. Non-Paper Physical Media</p>	<p>Actual and most reasonably economical cost of:</p> <p>Flash Drives \$ _____ x number used _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>Computer Discs \$ _____ x number used _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>Other Media \$ _____ x number used _____ = \$ _____</p>	<p>\$ _____</p>

4. Paper Copies	<p>Actual total incremental cost of duplication (not including labor) up to a <u>maximum of 10 cents per page</u>:</p> <p>Letter paper (8 1/2" x 11") number of sheets ___ x \$0. ___ = \$ _____</p> <p>Legal paper (8 1/2" x 14") number of sheets ___ x \$0. ___ = \$ _____</p> <p>Actual cost of other types of paper:</p> <p>Type of Paper: _____ number of sheets ___ x \$ _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>Type of Paper: _____ number of sheets ___ x \$ _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>(NOTE: Must print double-sided if available and costs less.)</p>	<p>\$ _____</p>
5. Labor Cost – Duplication Copying, and transferring records to non-paper physical media	<p>Enter the hourly wage of lowest paid employee capable of performing the duplication, copying, or transferring digital records to non-paper physical media \$ _____ per hour</p> <p>Multiply the wage by the fringe benefit multiplier (maximum of 50% of the hourly wage); OR, if the requested information is available online and the requestor request the documents to be provided in another format, the fringe benefit multiplier may exceed 50% (not to exceed actual cost) _____ %</p> <p>Multiply the hourly wage times the fringe benefit multiplier \$ _____ x 1. _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>If stipulated by the requestor, add the hourly overtime wage increment (but do not include in the calculation of fringe benefit costs) \$ _____ + _____ = \$ _____</p> <p>Divide the resulting hourly wage by _____ to determine the charge per _____ (___) minute increment \$ _____ / 60 = \$ _____</p> <p>(NOTE: May use any time increment for this category)</p>	
	<p>Number of ___ minute increments (partial time increments must be rounded down) multiplied by the permitted rate _____ x \$ _____ = \$ _____</p>	<p>\$ _____</p>
6. Mailing	<p>Actual cost of mailing records in a reasonable and economical manner:</p> <p>Cost of mailing: \$ _____</p>	

	Cost of least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation: \$_____	
	Cost of expedited shipping or insurance only if specifically stipulated by the requestor: \$_____	\$_____
	Subtotal	\$_____
Waivers and Reductions	<p>Subtract any Fee Waiver or Reduction: \$20.00 for indigency or nonprofit organization as further described in the Public Body's procedures and guidelines.</p> <p>Any amount determined by the Public Body due to the search and furnishing of the Public Record determined to be in the public interest. \$_____</p> <p>The reduction amount due to the late response of the Public Body. 5% of fee x ____ days late = _____% reduction (maximum reduction is 50%)</p>	-\$_____
Deposit	Subtract any good-faith deposit received: \$_____	-\$_____
	Total Due	\$_____

*Note: Labor costs for search, location, examination and redaction (categories 1 and 2 on the itemization form) may not be charged unless the failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the public body because of the nature of the request in the particular instance, and the public body specifically identifies the nature of these unreasonably high costs.

The Court of Appeals has interpreted this provision to require that the determination be made relative to the usual or typical costs incurred by the public body in responding to FOIA requests. The key factor in determining whether the costs are "unreasonably high" is the extent to which the particular request differs from the usual request. *Bloch v Davison Cmty Schools*, (Mich.App. Apr. 26, 2011), 2011 WL 1564645.

Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA)

1001 Woodward Ave, Suite 1400, Detroit, MI 48226

313-402-1020 PHONE

313-961-4869 FAX

info@rtamichigan.org / www.rtamichigan.org

Affidavit of Indigency

Submit this affidavit if you are seeking a waiver of costs due to indigency.

Under the Michigan FOIA, a public record search will be made and copy of a public record furnished without charge for the first \$20.00 of the fee for each request made by an individual who is entitled to information and who submits an affidavit stating that the individual is receiving public assistance or stating facts showing inability to pay due to indigency.

AFFIDAVIT

Date of Request _____ Name _____

Address _____
Street City State Zip

Telephone _____ Email _____

I am entitled to request waiver of the first \$20.00 of fees under the Michigan FOIA for the following reason(s):

I am currently receiving public assistance in the amount of \$ _____ per _____ week/month/year

Case No. _____ Type of Assistance _____

I am unable to pay the fee because of indigency, based on the following facts:

Income: _____

Employer name and address

_____ per _____
Length of present employment Average annual gross pay Average net pay week/month

Assets: State the value of all real property, vehicles, bank deposits, bonds, stocks, or other assets owned by you; use the back of this form, if necessary.

Other Facts: State any other facts showing indigency; use the back of this form, if necessary.

Signature _____

Sworn or affirmed before me on _____,

_____, Notary Public

_____ County, State of Michigan

Commission Expires: _____

Acting in the County of _____

