

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 2016 RECONVENED SESSION

CHAPTER 748

An Act to amend and reenact § 2.2-3704.1 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 2.2-3704.2, relating to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; designation of FOIA officer; posting of FOIA rights and responsibilities.

[H 818]

Approved April 20, 2016

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 2.2-3704.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 2.2-3704.2 as follows:

§ 2.2-3704.1. Posting of notice of rights and responsibilities by state and local public bodies; assistance by the Freedom of Information Advisory Council.

A. All state public bodies ~~created in the executive branch of state government and~~ subject to the provisions of this chapter ~~and any county or city, and any town with a population of more than 250,~~ shall make available the following information to the public upon request and shall post ~~such information on~~ a link to such information on the homepage of their respective public government websites:

1. A plain English explanation of the rights of a requester under this chapter, the procedures to obtain public records from the public body, and the responsibilities of the public body in complying with this chapter. For purposes of this section, "plain English" means written in nontechnical, readily understandable language using words of common everyday usage and avoiding legal terms and phrases or other terms and words of art whose usage or special meaning primarily is limited to a particular field or profession;

2. Contact information for the ~~person~~ FOIA officer designated by the public body pursuant to § 2.2-3704.2 to (i) assist a requester in making a request for records or (ii) respond to requests for public records;

3. A general description, summary, list, or index of the types of public records maintained by such state public body;

4. A general description, summary, list, or index of any exemptions in law that permit or require such public records to be withheld from release;

5. Any policy the public body has concerning the type of public records it routinely withholds from release as permitted by this chapter or other law; and

6. The following statement: "A public body may make reasonable charges not to exceed its actual cost incurred in accessing, duplicating, supplying, or searching for the requested records. No public body shall impose any extraneous, intermediary, or surplus fees or expenses to recoup the general costs associated with creating or maintaining records or transacting the general business of the public body. Any duplicating fee charged by a public body shall not exceed the actual cost of duplication. All charges for the supplying of requested records shall be estimated in advance at the request of the citizen as set forth in subsection F of § 2.2-3704 of the Code of Virginia."

B. The Freedom of Information Advisory Council, created pursuant to § 30-178, shall assist in the development and implementation of the provisions of subsection A, upon request.

§ 2.2-3704.2. Public bodies to designate FOIA officer.

A. All state public bodies, including state authorities, that are subject to the provisions of this chapter and all local public bodies that are subject to the provisions of this chapter, shall designate and publicly identify one or more Freedom of Information Act officers (FOIA officer) whose responsibility is to serve as a point of contact for members of the public in requesting public records and to coordinate the public body's compliance with the provisions of this chapter.

B. For such state public bodies, the name and contact information of the public body's FOIA officer to whom members of the public may direct requests for public records and who will oversee the public body's compliance with the provisions of this chapter shall be made available to the public upon request and be posted on the respective public body's website at the time of designation and maintained thereafter on such website for the duration of the designation.

C. For such local public bodies, the name and contact information of the public body's FOIA officer to whom members of the public may direct requests for public records and who will oversee the public body's compliance with the provisions of this chapter shall be made available in a way reasonably calculated to provide notice to the public, including posting at the public body's place of business, posting on its website, or including such information in its publications.

D. For the purposes of this section, local public bodies shall include constitutional officers.

E. Any such FOIA officer shall possess specific knowledge of the provisions of this chapter and be

trained at least annually by legal counsel for the public body or the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council.