

## Policy for Frequent and Multiple Requests for Public Records

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Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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## Policy for Frequent and Multiple Requests for Public Records

**Reference Number:** MTAS-456

### ***Reasonable Charges a Records Custodian May Charge for Frequent and Multiple Requests for Public Records***

**NOTE:** The Office of Open Records Counsel reviews this schedule annually.

See <https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orc/documents/oorc/policies-and-guidelines/ScheduleofReasonableCharges.pdf> [1]

Section 6 of Public Chapter 1179, Acts of 2008 ("Public Chapter 1179") adds T.C.A. Section 8-4-604(a)(2) which requires the Office of Open Records Counsel ("OORC") to establish a separate policy related to reasonable charges which a records custodian may charge for frequent and multiple requests for copies of public records under the Tennessee Public Records Act (T.C.A. Sections 10-7-503 *et seq.*)("TPRA"). This Policy will be reviewed at least annually by the OORC.

This Policy is to be used in connection with the Schedule of Reasonable Charges dated October 1, 2008. This Policy should not be interpreted as requiring a records custodian to impose charges for copies or duplication of public records. However, if the records custodian does determine to impose charges for copies or duplication, this Policy permits the records custodian to calculate labor charges differently for frequent and multiple requests.

If a records custodian determines to charge for frequent and multiple requests for copies or duplication of public records in accordance with this Policy, such determination and charges must be pursuant to a properly adopted rule and evidenced by a written policy authorized by the governmental entity's governing authority. The authority shall specify the level of aggregation (whether by agency, entity, department, office or otherwise); however, such level of aggregation, as well as excessive fees and other rules shall not be used to hinder access to non-exempt public records. A records custodian may reduce or waive, in whole or in part, any charge only in accordance with the governmental entity's properly adopted written policy.

The Schedule of Reasonable Charges provides that a records custodian may assess a requestor a fee for any labor reasonably necessary to produce copies of requested records after the records custodian spends one (1) hour (or if the records custodian establishes a threshold higher than one (1) hours, any increment of time over that higher threshold) producing the requested records. For purposes of this policy, during each calendar month records custodians in any department, division, agency, bureau, board, commission or other separate unit of state, county, or municipal government as authorized by the appropriate governing authority may aggregate the number of requests for copies made per requestor. When the total number of requests made by a requestor within a calendar month exceeds four, a records custodian may begin to charge the requestor a fee for any and all labor that is reasonably necessary to produce the copies of the requested records after informing the requestor that the aggregation limit has been met. Request for items that are routinely released and readily accessible, such as agendas for current calendar month meetings and approved minutes from meetings held in the previous calendar month, are exempt from this policy. A records custodian may adopt a labor threshold higher than one (1) hour or a threshold higher than four (4) requests per calendar month for purposes of aggregation. Disputes as to aggregation shall be brought to the Office of Open Records Counsel.

Additionally, a records custodian may aggregate the total number of public records requests made by a requestor and by any other individual, if the records custodian reasonably believes the requestor to be acting in concert with or as the agent of another person, entity or organization. A records custodian choosing to aggregate requests by multiple requestors must inform the requestors of the determination to aggregate and that they have the right to appeal the decision to aggregate to the Office of Open Records Counsel. When aggregating the labor of multiple requestors, the records custodian must file a Notice of Aggregation of Multiple Requestors with the Office of Open Records Counsel. This form is available on the Office's website.

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#### **Links:**

[1] <https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orc/documents/oorc/policies-and-guidelines/ScheduleofReasonableCharges.pdf>

*DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.*

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