

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO PUBLIC RECORDS -- PUBLIC RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Introduced By: Senator Melissa A. Murray

Date Introduced: March 07, 2025

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Secretary of State)

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Sections 38-3-2, 38-3-3, 38-3-4, 38-3-5.1, 38-3-6 and 38-3-7 of the General Laws in Chapter 38-3 entitled "Public Records Administration" are hereby amended to read as follows:

38-3-2. Definitions.

~~For the purpose of this chapter~~ As used in this chapter:

(1) "Administrator" means the public records administrator who coordinates and manages the activities and responsibilities of the public records administration program. The administrator shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the secretary of state.

(2) "Agency" or "public body" ~~shall mean~~ means any executive, legislative, judicial, regulatory, administrative body of the state, or any political subdivision thereof; including, but not limited to, any department, division, agency, commission, board, office, bureau, authority, any school, fire, or water district, or other agency or quasi-public agency of state or local government which exercises governmental functions, or any other public or private agency, person, partnership, corporation, or business entity acting on behalf of any public agency.

(3) "Electronic" means relating to technology having electrical, digital, magnetic, wireless, optical, electromagnetic, or similar capabilities.

(4) "Electronic record" means a record created, generated, sent, communicated, received, or stored by electronic means.

(5) "Program" ~~shall mean~~ means the public records administration program of the

1 secretary of state.

2 ~~(3)~~(6) "Public record" or "public records" ~~shall mean~~ means all documents, papers, letters,
3 maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, electronic records, or other material
4 regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in
5 connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.

6 ~~(4) "Public records repository" shall mean the establishment maintained by the program~~
7 ~~for preservation of those public records determined by the program to have permanent value~~
8 ~~warranting their continued preservation and which has been accepted by the program for transfer~~
9 ~~to its custody.~~

10 ~~(5)~~(7) "Records center" ~~shall mean an establishment maintained by the program for the~~
11 means a facility, under the direction of the administrator that provides storage, processing,
12 servicing, and security of public records that must be retained for varying periods of time but need
13 not be retained in an agency's office equipment or space.

14 ~~(6)~~(8) "Records control schedule" or "records retention schedule" ~~shall mean~~ means the
15 document or documents establishing the official retention, maintenance, and disposal requirements
16 for a record or record series, ~~or type of record~~ based ~~on~~ upon any administrative, legal, fiscal, ~~and/or~~
17 historical ~~values for the scheduled records~~ value related to that record or records series.

18 (9) "Record copy" means the record that an agency designates as the official record for
19 legal and business purposes, and to which the agency applies records management policy measures
20 for the protection, security, maintenance and/or preservation thereof.

21 (10) "Records officer" means the representative designated by an agency as responsible for
22 the operation of the records management program for the agency and related communications with
23 the public records administration.

24 (11) "Record series" means a collection of records maintained as a group and derived from
25 or related to a particular subject, activity or function of an agency.

26 (12) "Retention" means the duration of time that a record, record series, or other
27 information shall be maintained in its original form.

28 (13) "Secretary" means the Rhode Island secretary of state.

29 (14) "State archives" means the official state repository or any other repository approved
30 by the state archivist for long-term or permanent records.

31 (15) "State archivist" means the individual who coordinates, directs, and administers the
32 activities and responsibilities of the state archives.

33 **38-3-3. Public records administration program.**

34 (a) The public records administration program shall be organized as deemed necessary by

1 the secretary ~~of state~~ for the proper discharge of its duties and responsibilities under this chapter.
2 All personnel, furnishings, equipment, finances, property, and contractual arrangements of the
3 public records administration shall be the responsibility of the secretary ~~of state~~.

4 ~~(b) There shall be a public records advisory commission consisting of seventeen (17)~~
5 ~~members, one of whom shall be a member of the senate chosen by the president of the senate, one~~
6 ~~of whom shall be a member of the house of representatives chosen by the speaker of the house, six~~
7 ~~(6) of whom shall be chosen by the governor, and seven (7) of whom shall be chosen by the~~
8 ~~secretary of state. The secretary of state or designee shall serve as a permanent member of the~~
9 ~~commission. The state archivist shall serve as a permanent member of the commission. The~~
10 ~~appointments shall consist of persons who are qualified by training and experience with proven~~
11 ~~interest in historical records and public records management. In the first instance, five (5) members~~
12 ~~shall be appointed for a one year term, two (2) by the governor and three (3) by the secretary of~~
13 ~~state; five (5) members shall be appointed for a two (2) year term, one by the speaker of the house,~~
14 ~~one by the president of the senate, two (2) by the governor, and one by the secretary of state; five~~
15 ~~(5) members shall be appointed for a three (3) year term, two (2) by the governor, and three (3) by~~
16 ~~the secretary of state. The members shall hold office until July 1, in the years in which their~~
17 ~~respective terms end. Thereafter, prior to July 1, successors shall be appointed to the commission~~
18 ~~to the members of the commission whose terms expired. Vacancy of a member shall be filled by~~
19 ~~appointment by the corresponding authority for the remainder of the unexpired terms.~~

20 ~~(c) The secretary of state or designee shall serve as the chairperson of the commission. The~~
21 ~~state archivist or designee shall serve as the secretary of the commission with voting rights.~~

22 ~~(d) It shall be the duty of the public records advisory commission to provide professional~~
23 ~~and technical assistance to the public records administration program, the state archives, and the~~
24 ~~local governments of the state in all matters relating to the administration of public records.~~
25 ~~Members of the commission shall serve without pay.~~

26 ~~(e) The secretary of state may appoint an administrator of the program and shall establish~~
27 ~~his or her qualifications other than the professional competence required. The administrator shall~~
28 ~~coordinate, direct, and administer the activities and responsibilities of the program. The~~
29 ~~administrator shall serve at the pleasure of the secretary of state.~~

30 (f) The program may make and enter into contracts and agreements with other agencies,
31 organizations, associations, corporations, and individuals, or federal agencies as it may determine
32 are necessary, expedient, or incidental to the performance of its duties or the execution of its powers
33 under this chapter.

34 (g) The program shall adopt rules and regulations deemed necessary to carry out its duties

1 and responsibilities under this chapter which rules shall be binding on all agencies and persons
2 affected thereby. The willful violation of any of the rules and regulations adopted by the program
3 shall constitute a misdemeanor.

4 (h) The program may accept gifts, grants, bequests, loans, and endowments for purposes
5 not inconsistent with its responsibilities under this chapter.

6 **38-3-4. Duties of administrator.**

7 ~~(a) It shall be the duty and responsibility of the administrator to render all services required~~
8 ~~by the program herein set forth that can advantageously and effectively be centralized. The office~~
9 ~~shall perform such other functions and duties as the secretary of state may direct.~~

10 ~~(b) The administrator shall supervise, direct, and coordinate the activities of the program.~~

11 ~~(c) The administrator shall be designated "the public records administrator".~~

12 It shall be the duty and responsibility of the administrator to:

13 (1) Establish and administer a public records management program, for public bodies
14 which shall be primarily responsible for assisting state agencies and cities and towns with the care
15 and management of public records, including the operation of a record center or centers, and apply
16 efficient and economical management methods relating to the creation, utilization, retention,
17 preservation, and disposal of records or the transfer of permanent records to the state archives.

18 (2) Establish and administer a local government records program which shall be primarily
19 responsible for assisting cities and towns with the care and management of their public records.
20 The program shall be charged with designing and implementing a training program for local
21 government records keepers, publishing retention schedules for the proper disposition of public
22 records in local governments, and providing technical and advisory assistance in the storage,
23 preservation and ongoing maintenance of the records of local governments.

24 (3) Analyze, develop, establish, and coordinate standards, procedures, and techniques of
25 record making and record keeping to ensure the access, security, and preservation of public records.

26 (4) Institute and maintain a training and information program including, but not limited to,
27 the publication of educational materials on all phases of records management to bring to the
28 attention of all agencies approved and current practices, methods, procedures, and devices for the
29 efficient and economical management of records.

30 (5) Make continuous surveys of record keeping operations, to examine the condition of
31 public records and recommend improvements to public officials in current records management
32 practices, space, equipment, supplies, and personnel in creating, maintaining, and making available
33 the public records in their custody.

34 (6) Establish and maintain a program, in cooperation with each agency, for the selection

1 and protection of public records considered essential to the operation of government and to the
2 protection of the rights and privileges of citizens.

3 (7) Create forms for records management processes and the development of the required
4 records control schedules submitted by an agency to the program.

5 (8) Create, analyze, and uphold records control schedules of public records in the custody
6 of state and local agencies.

7 (9) Establish safeguards against unauthorized or unlawful removal or loss of records.

8 (10) Initiate appropriate action to recover records removed unlawfully or without
9 authorization.

10 (11) Preserve and administer such public records as shall be transferred to the state archives
11 according to approved conservation and security practices, and to permit them to be inspected,
12 examined, and copied at reasonable times and under supervision of the program; provided that, any
13 record placed in keeping of the program under special terms or conditions restricting their use shall
14 be made available only in accordance with the provisions of § 38-2-2.

15 (12) Provide a public research room where, upon policies established by the program, the
16 records in the state archives may be studied.

17 (13) Make certified copies under seal of any records transferred to it upon the application
18 of any person, and sign the certificates which shall have the same force and effect as if made by the
19 agency from which the records were received. The program may charge a reasonable fee for this
20 service.

21 (14) Assist agencies in identifying, securing, and transferring records of permanent legal,
22 historical or enduring value to the state archives.

23 (15) Approve emergency destruction of public records which were damaged due to
24 catastrophic, environmental, or otherwise unforeseen circumstances and pose a risk to human
25 health, but have not met their established retention.

26 (16) Submit a yearly report on the progress of the local government records program to the
27 general officers and to the general assembly.

28 (17) Request funding for the public records administration program in accordance with §
29 38-3-3 and for the local government records program pursuant to § 42-8.1-20(e) as part of the
30 operating budget of the office of secretary of state to operate the program.

31 (18) Render all services required by the program herein set forth that can advantageously
32 and effectively be centralized.

33 (19) Facilitate the transfer of permanent records of any state or local agency, elected
34 official, or of the general assembly to the state archives for permanent preservation and public

1 [access.](#)

2 [\(20\) To perform such other functions and duties as the secretary may direct.](#)

3 **~~38-3-5.1. Reproduction of public records — Destruction of original records~~**

4 **Reproduction of public records.**

5 [\(a\)](#) If any department or agency of government, in the regular course of business or activity,
6 has kept or recorded any ~~memorandum, writing, state tax returns, report, application, payment,~~
7 ~~entry, print, representation, or combination thereof, or any act, transaction, occurrence, or event,~~
8 ~~and, in the regular course of business,~~ [public record or](#), has caused any or all of the [public](#) records
9 to be recorded, copied, or reproduced by a photographic, ~~photostatic~~, microfilm, micro-card, ~~optical~~
10 ~~disk, miniature photographic,~~ [electronic](#) or other process which accurately reproduces or forms a
11 durable medium for reproducing the original;

12 [\(i\)](#) ~~the~~ [The](#) original may be destroyed, [and the reproduction established as the record copy,](#)
13 in the regular course of business, provided the process meets standards established by the public
14 records administration, and provided all the provisions of § 38-3-6 concerning disposal of public
15 records [readability and accessibility](#) are fulfilled.

16 [\(ii\)](#) The reproduction, when satisfactorily identified, shall be admissible in evidence as the
17 original in any judicial or administrative proceeding whether or not the original exists or is available
18 and an enlargement or facsimile of the reproduction shall be likewise admissible in evidence if the
19 original is in existence and available for inspection under the direction of the court.

20 [\(b\)](#) The introduction of a reproduced record, enlargement, or facsimile into evidence shall
21 not preclude the admission into evidence of the original, [if available](#).

22 [\(c\)](#) [The duplicate of any record made pursuant to this chapter, and designated as a record](#)
23 [copy, shall have the same force and effect for all purposes as the original record.](#)

24 [\(d\)](#) [When provided in response to a request from the public, a certified copy shall have the](#)
25 [same force and effect for all purposes as the original record.](#)

26 [\(e\)](#) This section shall not be construed to exclude from introduction into evidence any
27 document or copy thereof which is otherwise admissible under the Rhode Island general laws, as
28 amended.

29 **38-3-6. Public records custody and disposal.**

30 (a) Each agency shall prepare and submit to the program, in accordance with the rules and
31 regulations of the program, record control schedules for all public records in the custody of the
32 agency.

33 (b) ~~The offices of the attorney general and the auditor general will advise the program on~~
34 ~~the legal and fiscal values of records covered by proposed records control schedules.~~ [Proposed](#)

schedules shall be sent to the offices of the attorney general and the auditor general. Within one hundred and twenty (120) days of receipt, the attorney general and the auditor general may, within their discretion, provide the administrator with comments regarding the proposed schedule. If the proposed schedules are not returned to the administrator within one hundred and twenty (120) days of receiving the proposed schedule, the proposed schedule may nonetheless be made final for use in records disposition pursuant to § 38-3-7(4).

(c) Those records which are determined by an agency not to be needed in the transaction of current business but which, for legal or fiscal requirements, must be retained for specific time periods beyond administrative needs, ~~shall~~ may be sent to the records center. The records will be kept in the center until time for disposition as provided in record control schedules.

(d) Public records possessing ~~permanent~~ enduring value and that have not yet met minimum retention as determined by ~~approved~~ the records control schedules ~~shall~~ may be transferred to the ~~public records repository when no longer needed by an agency in transaction of current business~~ state records center after the twentieth year or when no longer considered active.

(e) Public records determined to be of permanent value according to the records retention schedule and by the administrator in consultation with the state archivist, shall be transferred to the state archives following assessment after the twentieth year, if not sooner, if the transfer of custody is in the best interest of the record.

~~(e)~~(f) Title to any record placed in the records center shall remain ~~in~~ with the agency placing the record in the center.

~~(f)~~(g) Title to any record transferred to the ~~public records repository~~ state archives, as authorized in this chapter, shall be vested in the program and shall be made available to the public.

~~(g)~~(h) ~~The program shall preserve and administer such public records as shall be transferred to its custody according to approved conservation and security practices, and to permit them to be inspected, examined, and copied at reasonable times and under supervision of the program; provided that any~~ Any record placed in keeping of the program under special terms or conditions restricting their use shall be made available only in accordance with the ~~terms and conditions~~ provisions of § 38-2-2.

~~(h)~~(i) Provide a public research room where, upon policies established by the program, the records in the ~~public records repository~~ state archives may be studied.

~~(i) The program may make certified copies under seal of any records transferred to it upon the application of any person, and the certificates, signed by the administrator or his or her designee, shall have the same force and effect as if made by the agency from which the records were received. The program may charge a reasonable fee for this service.~~

(j) No public record shall be destroyed or otherwise disposed of by any agency without prior notice to, and approval by, the program pursuant to § 38-3-6(a). Records without established retention in an approved records retention schedule cannot be destroyed.

(k) The program shall adopt reasonable rules and regulations not inconsistent with this chapter relating to the destruction and disposal of records. The rules and regulations shall provide but not be limited to:

(1) Procedures for preparing and submitting record control schedules to the program.

(2) Procedures for the physical destruction or other disposal of records.

(3) Standards for the reproduction of records for security or with a view to the disposal of the original record.

~~(l) The program shall:~~

~~(1) Establish safeguards against unauthorized or unlawful removal or loss of records; and~~

~~(2) Initiate appropriate action to recover records removed unlawfully or without authorization.~~

~~(m) The program may prepare and publish handbooks, guides, indexes, and other literature directed toward encouraging the management, preservation, and uses of the state's public records resource.~~

38-3-7. Agency responsibilities. Duties and responsibilities of agencies.

It shall be the duty of each agency to:

(1) Cooperate with the program in complying with the provisions of this chapter.

(2) Establish and maintain ~~an~~ active and continuous ~~program~~ procedure for the economical and efficient management of public records, including, but not limited to, working with the administrator to create and update records control schedules and transfer permanent records to the state archives.

(3) Transfer records, or any reasonably segregable portion thereof not including personal papers deemed not public pursuant to § 42-8.1-2(11), created or received by general officers, immediate staff, or a unit or individual of the executive office whose function is to advise and assist general officers, in the course of conducting activities which relate to or have an effect upon the carrying out of the constitutional, statutory, or other official duties carried out on behalf of the state. Such materials shall be transferred at the end of the elected official's final term within thirty (30) days of leaving such office.

(4) Submit a certification of records destruction for approval by the program for each public record the agency seeks to destroy once it has met its approved minimum retention period. The certification of records destruction shall be the permanent replacement for duly approved destroyed

public records.

(5) Not later than January 1, 2026, designate a records officer who has responsibility for compliance with this chapter and has been provided orientation and training by the public records administration regarding this chapter. The records officer:

(i) Shall establish and operate a records management program for the agency in cooperation with the public records administration and state archives;

(ii) May delegate responsibilities to an individual within the agency at the records officer's discretion;

(iii) Annually confirm the accuracy of the agency's records control schedule and request amendments if necessary;

(iv) Annually submit for approval of destruction of records that have met minimum retention periods based on the records control schedule; and

(v) May also serve as the agency forms management representative as required by § 42-84-5.

SECTION 2. Chapter 38-3 of the General Laws entitled "Public Records Administration" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following sections:

38-3-8. Public reporting of compliance.

Every year the secretary shall prepare a report summarizing the compliance with the provisions of this chapter, which shall be submitted to the general assembly and which shall be published electronically on the department of state website.

38-3-9. Violations.

The administrator is hereby empowered to bring an action in superior court for restraining orders and injunctive relief to restrain and enjoin violations or threatened violations of any provision of this chapter.

38-3-10. Severability.

If any provision of this chapter or the application of this chapter to any person or circumstances is held invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this chapter are declared to be severable.

SECTION 3. Section 38-3-5 of the General Laws in Chapter 38-3 entitled "Public Records Administration" is hereby repealed.

~~38-3-5. Duties of program.~~

~~It shall be the duty and responsibility of the public records administration program to:~~

~~(1) Establish and administer a public records management program, including the operation~~

1 ~~of a record center or centers, and appoint a director who will apply efficient and economical~~
2 ~~management methods relating to the creation, utilization, maintenance, retention, preservation, and~~
3 ~~disposal of records.~~

4 ~~(2) Analyze, develop, establish, and coordinate standards, procedures, and techniques of~~
5 ~~record making and record keeping.~~

6 ~~(3) Insure the maintenance and security of records which are deemed appropriate for~~
7 ~~preservation.~~

8 ~~(4) Institute and maintain a training and information program in all phases of records~~
9 ~~management to bring to the attention of all agencies approved and current practices, methods,~~
10 ~~procedures, and devices for the efficient and economical management of records.~~

11 ~~(5) Make available a centralized program of microfilming for the benefit of all agencies.~~

12 ~~(6) Make continuous surveys of record keeping operations.~~

13 ~~(7) Recommend improvements in current records management practices, including the use~~
14 ~~of space, equipment, supplies, and personnel in creating, maintaining, and servicing records.~~

15 ~~(8)(i) Establish and maintain a program, in cooperation with each agency, for the selection~~
16 ~~and protection of public records considered essential to the operation of government and to the~~
17 ~~protection of the rights and privileges of citizens.~~

18 ~~(ii) Make or to have made duplicates of essential records, or to designate existing record~~
19 ~~copies as essential records to be protected in the place and manner of safekeeping as prescribed by~~
20 ~~the program.~~

21 ~~(iii) The duplicate of any record made pursuant to this chapter shall have the same force~~
22 ~~and effect for all purposes as the original record. A transcript, exemplification, or certified copy of~~
23 ~~the duplicate shall be deemed, for all purposes, to be the original record.~~

24 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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LC001329
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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO PUBLIC RECORDS -- PUBLIC RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

1 This act would update the public records administration act by designating a public records
2 administrator, amending the definition of records, adding various definitions to include, electronic,
3 records series, state archivist, and retention, modifying a records control schedule, designating a
4 records officer and establish procedures for the retention of public records and their transfer after
5 twenty (20) years to the state archives. It would also provide that a research room be established
6 for research of records, that the administrator submit yearly reports, provide certified copies,
7 approve emergency destruction of public records and perform other functions and duties as the
8 secretary of state may direct.

9 This act would take effect upon passage.

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