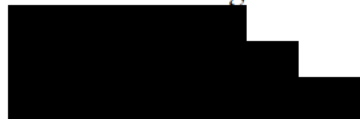




June 23, 2026

Via E-File Portal Only:

Matthew Dowling


Via E-File Portal Only:

Morgan Keteles/Mark Rafail
Agency Open Records Officer
Fayette County
61 E. Main Street
Uniontown, PA 15401
fayettertk@fayettepa.org

RE: OFFICIAL NOTICE OF APPEAL - Dowling v. Fayette County OOR Dkt. AP 2026-2429

Dear Parties:

Review this information and all enclosures carefully as they affect your legal rights.

The Office of Open Records (“OOR”) received this appeal under the Right-to-Know Law (“RTKL”), 65 P.S. §§ 67.101, et seq. on June 18, 2026. A binding Final Determination (“FD”) will be issued pursuant to the timeline required by the RTKL, **please see the attached information for more information about deadlines.**

Notes for both parties (more information in the enclosed documents):

- The docket number above must be included on all submissions related to this appeal.
- Any information provided to the OOR must be provided to all parties involved in this appeal. Information that is not shared with all parties will not be considered.
- All submissions to the OOR, other than *in camera* records, will be public records. Do not include any sensitive information- such as Social Security numbers.

If you have questions about this appeal, please contact the assigned Appeals Officer (contact information enclosed), providing a copy of any correspondence to all parties involved in this appeal.

Sincerely,


Elizabeth Wagenseller
Executive Director

Enc.: Description of RTKL appeal process
 Assigned Appeals Officer contact information
 Entire appeal as filed with OOR

The Right-to-Know Law Appeal Process

Please review this information carefully as it affects your legal rights.

The Office of Open Records (“OOR”) has received the enclosed appeal, which was filed under the Right-to-Know Law (“RTKL”), 65 P.S. §§ 67.101, et seq. A binding Final Determination will be issued by the OOR pursuant to the statutory timeline, subject to the notice of deadlines enclosed herein. If you have any questions, please contact the Appeals Officer assigned to this case. Contact information is included on the enclosed documents. **With limited exceptions, the Appeals Officer should be contacted through the E-File Portal.**

Submissions to the OOR

Both parties may submit evidence, legal argument, and general information to support their positions to the assigned Appeals Officer. Please contact the Appeals Officer as soon as possible.

Any information provided to the OOR must be provided to all parties involved in this appeal. Information submitted to the OOR will not be considered unless it is also shared with all parties.

Include the docket number on all submissions.

The agency may assert exemptions on appeal even if it did not assert them when the request was denied (*Levy v. Senate of Pa.*, 65 A.3d 361 (Pa. 2013)).

It is strongly advised that attorneys and other party representatives **file an Entry of Appearance** by uploading an Entry of Appearance form to the E-File Portal or completing the form at: <https://www.openrecords.pa.gov/Appeals/EntryOfAppearance.cfm>.

NOTE TO AGENCIES: If an Entry of Appearance is not filed, the AORO is responsible to inform attorneys and other party representatives of all docket activity.

Generally, submissions to the OOR — other than *in camera* records — will be public records. Do not include sensitive or personal information, such as Social Security numbers, on any submissions.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Be aware that AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Google Gemini, etc.) routinely generate false citations, quotes, summaries, and facts. Parties should not use AI tools for legal advice. If a party uses an AI tool to generate a submission to the OOR, that party **must** ensure that the contents of the submission are accurate in fact and in law.

Appeals Officers may reject submissions to the OOR that contain material inaccuracies or lack probative value, clarity, or conciseness. Failure to present facts, arguments, or evidence in good faith may subject parties to additional sanctions.

Agency Must Notify Third Parties

If records affect a legal or security interest of a third party; contain confidential, proprietary or trademarked records; or are held by a contractor or vendor, **the agency shall notify the Appeals Officer immediately.** The Appeals Officer may direct the agency to notify such parties of the appeal and provide proof of that notice.

If directed to provide notice, such notice will include: (1) A copy of all documents included with this letter; and (2) A statement advising relevant third parties that interested persons may request to participate in this appeal by contacting the Appeals Officer or completing the form at <https://www.openrecords.pa.gov/Appeals/DIPRequest.cfm>. (see 65 P.S. § 67.1101(c)).

The Commonwealth Court has held that “the burden [is] on third-party contractors... to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the [requested] records are exempt.” (*Allegheny County Dep’t of Admin. Servs. v. A Second Chance, Inc.*, 13 A.3d 1025, 1042 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2011)). **A third party's failure to participate in a RTKL appeal before the OOR, after receiving notice, may be construed as a waiver of objections regarding release of requested records.**

If either party has questions about this requirement, they should immediately contact the Appeals Officer.

Statements of Fact & Burden of Proof

Statements of fact must be supported by an affidavit or attestation made under penalty of perjury by a person with actual knowledge. Statements of fact or allegations submitted without an affidavit may not be considered.

Under the RTKL, the agency has the burden of proving that records are exempt from public access (see 65 P.S. § 67.708(a)(1)). **To meet this burden, the agency must provide evidence to the OOR.**

The law requires the agency position to be supported by sufficient facts and citation to all relevant sections of the RTKL, case law, and OOR Final Determinations.

An affidavit or attestation is required to prove that records do not exist.

Sample affidavits are on the OOR website, openrecords.pa.gov.

Any evidence or legal arguments not submitted or made to the OOR may be waived.

Preserving Responsive Records

The agency must preserve all potentially responsive records during the RTKL appeal process, including all proceedings before the OOR and any subsequent appeals to court.

Failure to properly preserve records may result in the agency being sanctioned by a court for acting in bad faith.

See *Lockwood v. City of Scranton*, 2019-CV-3668 (Lackawanna County Court of Common Pleas), holding that an agency had “a mandatory duty” to preserve records after receiving a RTKL request. Also see generally *Uniontown Newspapers, Inc. v. Pa. Dep’t of Corr.*, 185 A.3d 1161 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2018), holding that “a fee award holds an agency accountable for its conduct during the RTKL process...”

Mediation

The OOR offers a mediation program as an alternative to the standard appeal process. To participate in the mediation program, both parties must agree in writing.

The agency must preserve all potentially responsive records during the RTKL appeal process. Mediation is a voluntary, informal process to help parties reach a mutually agreeable settlement. The OOR has had great success in mediating RTKL cases.

If mediation is successful, the requester will withdraw the appeal. This ensures that the case will not proceed to court — saving both sides time and money.

Either party can end mediation at any time.

If mediation is unsuccessful, both parties will be able to make submissions to the OOR as outlined on this document, and the OOR will have no less than 30 calendar days from the conclusion of the mediation process to issue a Final Determination.

Parties are encouraged to consider the OOR's mediation program as an alternative way to resolve disputes under the RTKL.



APPEALS OFFICER:

Lyle Hartranft, Esq.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Office of Open Records
555 Walnut Street, Suite 605
Harrisburg, PA 17101-1925**

PHONE:

(717) 346-9903

FACSIMILE:

(717) 425-5343

**Preferred method of contact and
submission of information:**

E-FILE PORTAL

**PARTIES WITHOUT COMPUTER OR INTERNET ACCESS SHOULD PROCEED BY MAIL
OR FACSIMILE**

**Please direct submissions and correspondence related to this appeal to the above Appeals Officer.
Please include the case name and docket number on all submissions.**

You must copy the other party on everything you submit to the OOR.

The OOR website, <https://openrecords.pa.gov>, is searchable and both parties are encouraged to review prior final determinations involving similar records and fees that may impact this appeal.



IN THE MATTER OF

Requester

v.

Agency

:
:
:
:
:
:
:
:
:

OOR Dkt. AP _____

Please accept my appearance for the _____ in the above captioned case.
(Requester/Agency)

PUBLIC RECORD NOTICE: ALL FILINGS WITH THE OOR WILL BE PUBLIC RECORDS AND SUBJECT TO PUBLIC ACCESS WITH LIMITED EXCEPTION. IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO INCLUDE PERSONAL CONTACT INFORMATION IN A PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE RECORD, PLEASE PROVIDE ALTERNATE CONTACT INFORMATION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE FUTURE CORRESPONDENCE RELATED TO THIS APPEAL.

Attorney: _____

Firm: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Please submit this form to the Appeals Officer assigned to the appeal. Remember to copy all parties on this correspondence. The Office of Open Records will not consider direct interest filings submitted after a Final Determination has been issued in the appeal.

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE BEFORE THE OOR

Please accept this as a Request to Participate in a currently pending appeal before the Office of Open Records. The statements made herein and in any attachments are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief. I understand this statement is made subject to the penalties of 18 Pa.C.S. § 4904, relating to unsworn falsifications to authorities.

NOTE: The requester filing the appeal with the OOR is a named party in the proceeding and is NOT required to complete this form.

OOR Docket No: _____

Today's date: _____

Name: _____

PUBLIC RECORD NOTICE: ALL FILINGS WITH THE OOR WILL BE PUBLIC RECORDS AND SUBJECT TO PUBLIC ACCESS WITH LIMITED EXCEPTION. IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO INCLUDE PERSONAL CONTACT INFORMATION IN A PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE RECORD, PLEASE PROVIDE ALTERNATE CONTACT INFORMATION IN ORDER TO RECEIVE FUTURE CORRESPONDENCE RELATED TO THIS APPEAL.

Address/City/State/Zip _____

E-mail _____

Fax Number: _____

Name of Requester: _____

Address/City/State/Zip _____

Telephone/Fax Number: _____ / _____

E-mail _____

Name of Agency: _____

Address/City/State/Zip _____

Telephone/Fax Number: _____ / _____

E-mail _____

Record at issue: _____

I have a direct interest in the record(s) at issue as (check all that apply):

- ☐ An employee of the agency
- ☐ The owner of a record containing confidential or proprietary information or trademarked records
- ☐ A contractor or vendor
- ☐ Other: (attach additional pages if necessary) _____

I have attached a copy of all evidence and arguments I wish to submit in support of my position.

Respectfully submitted, _____ (must be signed)

Please submit this form to the Appeals Officer assigned to the appeal. Remember to copy all parties on this correspondence. The Office of Open Records will not consider direct interest filings submitted after a Final Determination has been issued in the appeal.